

100 Reasons to NOT have the Secret Affair: and what to do if one
shows up in *your* life

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Bibliography

Keith:

- *Monogamy and secret affairs both involve relationship and sex.*
- *John Gottman emotional coaching/dismissing, applied through growth mindsets, the talent code, and secure/insecure relationship styles.*

INTRODUCTION

Imagine:

You've been at the new job for three months and are happy to be in the workplace after your youngest is finally in kindergarten. There's this sweet guy who always notices your outfits (he loved your new perfume), and you find yourself looking forward to him stopping by your desk and exchanging pleasantries in the morning. When he smiles at you and asks you about your weekend, he seems to really *listen*. You feel it all the way down to your toes. His wife's gone a lot on business and doesn't seem to understand how hard it is for him to be alone. He asks if you can have a drink after work to give him some company during the long weekend when she's gone at her conference. You hear yourself saying, "That would be lovely," while thinking, "*The last time my husband asked me out for a drink was before I got pregnant.*"

Don't do it. It will become a nightmare.

Imagine:

Your wife hasn't seemed to want sex for years, and only says "yes" grudgingly. The new associate at the office is smart and friendly, and even though she dresses professionally, the curves of her body undulate delightfully when she moves. The last office lunch she listened admiringly to how you won the club golf tournament this year, and she smiles brightly when you catch her eye. You think, "*Why not ask her out for coffee? We can be friends.*"

Don't do it. That way lies madness and suffering.

25% and 15% are just the tip of the iceberg.

At least twenty-five percent of men and fifteen percent of women will cheat on their spouse. Other studies have found almost twice these figures. Some kind of secret sexual liaison will

constellate, energize, and actualize. If “spouse” means a committed lover relationship, the figures go up.

Given the infinite variation of human experience, I imagine a few of these affairs will work out for the highest good. My clinical experience says that 99% of them will hurt everyone involved, compromise children’s’ development, injure extended families, threaten professional standing and relationships, and generally be value subtracted from the social fabric.

I’m not alone in my beliefs. In one series of 2006 studies, 80.6% Americans agreed “infidelity is always wrong,” and 14.6% that “infidelity is almost always wrong.” Interestingly, in some groups these disapproval figures are going up (in 1991, 73.4% agreed “infidelity is always wrong”) while the numbers of affairs are also going up. In 1991, 15% of men and 12% of women under thirty-five said they’d been unfaithful, while in 2006 the numbers were 20% and 15%. Americans are having more affairs *and* are more disapproving of affairs.

Reason #1: Affairs hurt everybody.

Divorced couples were asked what contributed most to their breakups. 80% said they slowly moved apart—lost touch with one another. The researchers additionally asked if affairs had figured into their divorces, and 20% to 27% of the people said that affairs either caused or were major contributors to their divorce. The scientists concluded that since only 20% to 27% of people said affairs contributed to their divorces, that cheating wasn’t a huge factor.

“Only” 20% to 27%?

Only???!

And this doesn’t include distracting attractions, romantic infatuations, sexual secrets, porn habits, or sexual alienation. That “only” reflects a cultural blind spot where it’s hard to see the obvious.

Secret affairs cause enormous suffering. Just the idea that love might exist beyond a troubled marriage—the fantasy of a sweet affair—excites imagination. Yearning for easy romantic/erotic love can turn us away from our marriage, away from our family. Such turning away blocks the growing love between spouses that warms families and is good for everyone.

Reason #2: Affairs distract us from our responsibility to make the relationship we have work better. *I believe a great mandate for committed lovers is to support each other's growth as individual souls, lovers, parents, friends and beings. This is partly a personal moral value that's emerged from my life and work, but science also has something to say. Human psyches and bodies love to help others and be helped by others. Spouses doing this with one another increase immune function, reduce blood pressure, relax into more coherent heartbeats, live longer lives, boost happiness, and offer more to the world.*

Yes, we all want the love that tastes wonderful and seems to exist everywhere, and this yearning drives us to affairs. If you seek love from someone other than your spouse, you will probably find it in some form, but is that the answer to your yearning for romance and passion?

People seem to give up on finding romance in marriage. Maybe this is why Americans have the highest rate of romantic break ups in the world. I'm certain that relatively few of the 80% divorced people who "lost touch" with their spouse had vibrant, passionate, growing eroticism and romance in their marriages. I suspect most fantasized quite a bit about how great it would be to be in love with somebody, but affairs are not the answer to relationship problems. Development is the answer.

Reason #3: Affairs tend to block development.

I'm a psychologist who has conducted over sixty-five thousand therapy sessions with men, women, couples, teens, kids, and

families since 1973 and I'm here to testify that secret affairs literally screw everybody up.

Why are we so vulnerable to affairs? How can I love my wife/husband and “fall in love” with another person? If my lover and I keep it secret, how can anyone be hurt? My lover is unhappy in his marriage. He says his wife is clueless about him and won't—or “can't,” or, “could never”— fulfill his needs. Going out with him is practically like dating a single guy.

Chapter Five explores (and debunks) these and a long list of other common excuses and rationalizations—loopholes—for affairs. All are informed by evolutionary, cultural, relational, and biochemical forces that can work harmoniously towards relational integrity and transcendent marital love and passion. That is the promise of great monogamy—to turn the lemons of competing drives and forces into the lemonade of harmonious passion.

In the meantime, the short answer if you're *having* an affair is to find an experienced therapist to help you clean up the mess that is already there.

Reason #4: Therapy bills skyrocket when you have an affair.

The short answer if you've *haven't started* your affair is *don't do it*. Instead, turn courageous attention to loving your spouse. Visibly yearning and making it safe for your partner to do the same is scary, difficult, and might not save your marriage, but reaching for passion and love expands you. You grow and, if you do divorce, it was because you struggled unsuccessfully for passionate marital love, not because you cheated.

Jeff and Sage.

This book started in a session with a guy named Jeff married to a woman named Sage (all clients' names, and life details have been changed for obvious reasons; I can just imagine Jeff's boss saying,

“Hey Jeff, I just read this book where you were trying to talk yourself into going out on Sage.”).

Years ago, Jeff walks into my office full of energy and a burgeoning sense of sexual entitlement—a deepening loophole in his fidelity commitment. “Sage is sweet. She does wonderfully with the kids. She says ‘yes’ to sex pretty much when I want it. But she doesn’t want to do anything. She’s too busy with the kids’ school and her home business.”

“I’m sorry, Jeff. Tell me more.” He pours out the story he’s been living the last few years.

Sage never seems interested in Jeff’s tennis matches or business deals, though she’s available—occasionally somewhat unenthusiastically—for sex three to five times a week. For a long time, Jeff’s created one distracting attraction after another with women from work and his exercise community, but he has never acted out his impulses to the extent of starting a secret sexual relationship. Recently he seriously considered pursuing Shelly, a physical therapist who described herself as unhappily married (“She and her husband sleep in separate rooms,” he tells me with a certain weird tone of moral condemnation). Shelly let Jeff know unambiguously that she was available, and Jeff barely talked himself out of going for it, primarily out of fear of involvement with her two teenage sons having behavior problems (what a surprise).

Some women honestly don’t realize the power of letting a man know she is sexually available. Most guys know the feeling of catching fire for a woman who indicates she wants you. If the erotic polarity is hot, your brain starts talking you into sexually possessing her somehow.

Feeling regretful at the lost Shelly romance (and filled with juicy fantasies about how much fun it would have been), Jeff declares, “I want a hot lover with no negative drama attached.”

I laugh involuntarily. “Sorry Jeff. Drama comes with all relationships and colossal negative drama with affairs. Your

optimal path towards more passionate eroticism is working with Sage at improving your marriage—making it more intimate, sexy, and joyful.”

Jeff resists my opinions. “Sage could never change enough to meet my needs. Maybe an affair provides the missing ingredients to my happiness.”

Reason #5: Affairs always destabilize lives, marriages, and families. Jeff’s fantasy that an affair will provide a “missing ingredient” to his life and so make things better for his family is a common bullshit rationalization that never proves true.

At the end of our session, Jeff—a brilliant, capable, successful, charming businessman—stands by my desk while I fill out an appointment card for our next appointment. He looks at me with a playful smile, and asks, “Why shouldn’t I have an affair?”

I look up, overwhelmed by a cascade of associations of one disaster after another over my thirty-seven years of psychotherapy practice. Broken marriages, devastated children and spouses, ruined businesses, shredded social networks, and tens of millions of dollars to divorce lawyers. Literally laughing in exasperation, I tell him, “There are a hundred reasons to not have the affair.”

“Wow,” he says, “That should be a book.”

Well, here it is Jeff, for you and all of us.

If you read this book before you begin an affair, maybe you can avert the damage and pain to come. If you’re having an affair, there are ways you can reduce everyone’s suffering.

To those of you who have been—or are being—cheated on, give this book to your cheating spouse. Maybe he/she will finally understand your overwhelming feelings of betrayal, fear, rage, and despair, and why it’s so hard for you to, “get past it.” Maybe your

partner will get that you want deeper, more passionate love, and are inviting shared effort towards more satisfying intimacy.

The love of a husband and wife is in many ways our most important relationship. Strangely, it also is one of the most conditional loves there is. We are lover, friend, business partner, co-parent, confidant, mother, father, sister, brother, and moral compass to our spouse depending on situation and circumstance. *Any* of these connections can cause suffering and disconnection if injured or stunted. On the other hand, marital love provides some of our greatest opportunities to use love and secure attachment to accelerate our personal/relational/spiritual growth. A growing marital love gives children their best chance to thrive, channels our best gifts to the world, and is the central feature of most happy lives.

Just as you don't run your car without oil, you don't run your marriage without sexual fidelity. These are few of the hundred reasons to not have an affair.

CHAPTER ONE: MONOGAMY IS BEAUTIFUL AND DIFFICULT

I never stuck around before
Why, I do not know
Maybe I'm not self aware
Does she drive me through that door?
I don't know.
It comes and it goes.
Cause I was lying to myself,
How was I to know?
Yeah, lying to myself, baby,
How was I to know?

From, *Lying to Myself*,
by Blown Head Gasket

I came to appreciate monogamy later in life than most. Growing up in the fifties and sixties, I didn't see much to admire in sexually exclusive pair bonding. Sean Connery as James Bond seemed to live a much better life than Robert Young in *Father knows best*. James Bond had hot sex with multiple beautiful women and still miraculously maintained his freedom and warrior street creds. Robert Young presided over a boring family in a twin-bed sexless universe uncomfortably similar to my hometown. If there were sexually fulfilled couples in our neighborhood, they kept it to themselves.

Sexuality hit me in preadolescence like a freight train. I concluded I was abnormally driven, and couldn't imagine just one

woman ever meeting the urgent salacious yearning that dominated practically all of my waking moments.

Culturally, I received all kinds of bizarre messages about sex. I was an A student, but after junior high sex education I didn't really know what an orgasm was, and actually was afraid when I first started masturbating that I could give myself a venereal disease. My male peers simultaneously glorified sexual encounters, while demeaning girls who "put out." I was told by my therapist—who unabashedly loved and endorsed sex in many forms, but considered homosexuality a form of mental illness—to pursue the "loose girls" in high school. It sounded so good when he talked about it, but I couldn't quite get the hang of organizing my relationships just to get laid. My parents told me college would be "the best years of my life"—possibly because they thought I would party promiscuously—leaving me to wonder what the rest of my life would be like if happiness peaked from eighteen to twenty-two.

College did offer sexual liberation, but liberation comes in many forms.

The words, "Hippies," "Summer of love," "Turn on, tune in, and drop out," and, "Groovy," were not easy laugh lines in the sixties—they reflected an ethos that millions of Americans embraced wholeheartedly. I was a hippy and proud of it! Drugs, sex, and rock-n-roll suited me just fine as I—strange combination in retrospect—worked hard in college, protested the draft, pursued mastery in psychotherapy, practiced martial arts, sought countercultural transformation, and romanticized "open" relationships.

George and Nena O'Neil, authors of the 1972 best seller *Open Marriage*, maintained that "primary" and "secondary" sexual relationships could be balanced simultaneously. Their book, tame and obvious by today's standards, contained only twenty pages discussing sexual relationships outside of marriage, but those twenty pages ignited feverish fantasies in America. Predictably, the

O'Neils later divorced, but not before they provided powerful rationalizations for sexual wandering. My friends and I convinced ourselves we could achieve multiple relationships, group sex, communal lovers, and generally hooking up without guilt, if we just concentrated hard enough. Such adventures make good stories, but unstable relationships—especially because alcohol and drugs are usually part of the deal.

My future wife Becky and I met in 1973, and for eight years struggled to be non-exclusive. Every couple we knew during that period eventually broke up, but we stayed together. In 1981, after a passionate love affair with a woman I loved for two weeks and grieved for three months, I realized—somewhat shockingly—that the kind of sexuality and intimacy I craved in my life could only happen in monogamy. As I tell my students, monogamy didn't come to me easily, I had to earn it.

Back in 1981, Becky and I started dedicating Fridays to our lover relationship—we called it, “Romantic Fridays.” We'd wake up leisurely, eat a healthy breakfast, and go for a long hike on one of the lush trails behind our Santa Barbara house. We'd talk about everything that was up for either of us on those hikes. Therapy, money, sex, family, friends, and remodel projects were frequent conversations. Sometimes we fought and reconciled. We'd come home, shower, put on nice clothes, and go to one of our favorite Santa Barbara restaurants, the El Encanto or the Wine Cask. Over French cooking, Chardonnay, and more conversation, we'd relax into comfort and sensual pleasure. After dessert, we'd go home and make languorous love, fall into a nap, wake, and sometimes make love again. Two years of this had a profound effect on our nervous systems—we married, had two children, and have continued our love affair.

It's really quite wonderful.

Anyway, during this time I became fascinated with intimacy, sexuality, romance, development, and how they all fit together. I studied, practiced, and taught marriage counseling and sex therapy.

Gradually over the years, I realized that everyone developed a unique understanding of sexual intimacy, but that development, sexuality, and relationships clearly involved organizing principles and biological imperatives. For example, a central structure in human society is a man and woman in a pair bond—a marriage—usually with children.

Marriage from the Middle Ages into our present culture reveals how romance and eroticism morph through time—still expressing the drives and evolutionary demands we share with our forebears all the way back to the Big Bang.

History of marriage.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth century colonial period, Europe essentially conquered the world. Before this interval of history, 75% of societies allowed men to have more than one wife.

This is not surprising from an evolutionary standpoint. Primates are wired for males to seek multiple female partners to the extent that males are physically larger than females. Alpha Gorilla males—huge compared to females—have lots of mates. Men are ten to fifteen percent taller and heavier than women, and thus genetically hard-wired to create multiple wives if given the opportunity.

Agrarian societies dominating civilization the last eight to ten thousand years, ruled by men, concentrate wealth and resources. Women are often property in agrarian societies—belongings to be hoarded and protected, and so we see harems, mistresses, prostitution, and rape/sexual coercion commonly in such cultures.

The Renaissance blossoming of art and science heralded in the Enlightenment in the West. Simultaneously throughout Europe and North America, the values of freedom, democracy and reason caught fire. The Enlightenment is mostly associated with the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but the seeds of liberation were planted by classical Greek philosophers from Socrates and Plato (300 to 500 B.C.), to religious revolutionaries like Martin Luther (the sixteen hundreds), to individual-rights-based political

documents like the Magna Carta (1215)—one of the inspirations for our own U.S. Constitution, my favorite document.

As people develop morally, social justice and universal rights become progressively more appealing. You are probably more compassionate, less selfish, and more caring now than when you were three, eight, or fifteen.

If enough individuals in a society reach a new worldview—some estimate ten percent is a critical mass—major cultural changes occur. We saw this in the sixties with the rational/pluralistic baby-boomers rebelling against their conformist/rationalist parents and political leaders. I remember the contempt my fellow college students and I had for mainstream American society, driven by the news media's ridicule of modern music, free love, and the egalitarian multi-culturalism that were the mainstays of our college cultures.

As the Enlightenment—with its printing presses, wealth, and new technologies—accelerated through the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, liberation movements arose to separate church and state, end slavery, and ultimately give women equal social, financial, and political rights.

Reason #6: Affairs warp power structures of family cultures.

Cheating spouses (one class) assume more rights than cheated on spouses (another class). When these dynamics come to light, the fewer-rights class is prone to rage and moral indignation.

Enlightenment women enjoyed more rights, and—big surprise—the more rights they had, the harder it was for men to have multiple wives or secret affairs, and the more illegal and immoral it became for men to dominate women physically, sexually, and financially.

Development is include-and-transcend. New capacities subsume and build on previous capacities, often creating periods of disorganization and chaos, as new integrations are refined. A ten-month-old is an expert crawler, scooting around happily on hands and knees, while a ten-month-old walker totters about unsteadily,

falling easily. With practice, the child refines her skills and—in *addition to being a good crawler*—becomes an expert walker.

Individual worldviews change in the same include-and-transcend way.

Let's look at Luke, a grade-schooler happy with his family, friends, lego puzzles, and baseball. As Luke matures through junior high he becomes dissatisfied. Girls magnetize him, relationships feel more complicated, and he challenges rules he used to obey blindly. His little kid worldview frays around the edges and becomes disorganized. As Luke pursues new interests and insights, his perspectives reorganize and expand to transcend his old ones in greater capacities for critical thought, deeper understandings of the social/moral/physical world surrounding him, and new drives and yearnings (girls, social success, and maybe even serious professional aspirations). At one moment he can be childishy bantering with his little brother, while at another he listens patiently and kindly to this friend's troubles. He still likes to play video games and watch sports, but his new more adult self also watches the news and reads the paper with increased interest and understanding.

Cultural worldviews progress in similar include and transcend fashion. Hunter-gatherers gave way to horticultural tribes, who gave way to agrarian nations, who gave way to technological societies, who have given way to information based economies. Each of these types of societies has characteristic religious views, artistic interests, social structures, and attitudes towards men and women. Each also retains aspects of previous cultures in the same kind of include and transcend rhythm we observe in individual development.

Hunter-gatherers and horticultural tribes (often slash and burn jungle tribes using digging sticks but not plows and draft animals) share power between men and women, have a balance of male and female deities, and often engage in communal childrearing.

Agrarian societies (characterized by draft animals and plows in stable farms dominated by men) tend to be patriarchal, fundamentalist, and generally regard women as property.

Women-as-property did not fit comfortably into the technological cultures emerging over the last two hundred years, leading to disorganization of male dominance and reorganization along more egalitarian lines.

As we progress into the information age, we see progressive liberation movements (gay marriage is a current cutting edge), and much more diversity of information and opinion. Spirituality is more individualized and accepting, with church-goers, meditators, and spiritual seekers less at odds and more in agreement. Increasingly Americans are describing themselves as having personalized spiritual orientations rather than primary affiliations to particular churches, temples, or sects.

In the ever-accelerating cultural development of this period—especially through the twentieth century—we've seen lots of attitudes, laws, and social taboos coalesce and clash. Married men still had mistresses and liaisons, but married women more openly took lovers. Birth control liberated and empowered women sexually. Women entered universities and became scientists—today there are more women than men college students and graduates in American colleges. Men only *allowed* women to vote in 1920 in America, if you can believe that. Yes, *men decided* on whether women could vote—itself an amazing fact by today's standards. Sexually women have established the right to be publicly sexy, but not too sexy depending on shifting local mores.

Since the enlightenment, women have evolved into a strange mixture of often-contradictory social/financial symbols as well as an emergent, politically powerful, interest group. Has this affected marriage? You bet.

Reason #7: Equal power means it's much more dangerous to piss a woman off—as in cheating on her. Wives have power. She—or even her lover—can mess you up financially, materially, socially,

and even physically if she feels betrayed or misused. A huge percentage of murders, assaults, lawsuits, and abuse arise directly from infidelity.

Marriage as economic institution.

Before the twentieth century, marriage was mostly an economic institution. Property was apportioned and passed down by elaborate customs and laws based on blood lineage, anchored in marriage. To avoid bloody succession and inheritance conflicts, there needed to be hierarchical designations for children (for instance, first born sons inheriting estates and titles). Legal/religiously-sanctioned wedlock divided illegitimate children—very few rights—and legitimate children who had rights depending upon gender, birth order, and the expressed will of parents once legal documents—enforceable by official authority—became standards for commerce and statecraft. Jane Austin’s books all have tricky inheritance subplots, enforced by English law and upper class cultural prohibitions.

Romantic infatuation as temporary insanity.

Romantic love has fascinated people from earliest recorded history *in every culture*. Homer’s *Iliad* is a story of the cataclysmic Trojan War, fought over the love of Helen, “The face that launched a thousand ships, and caused the topless towers of Ileum to fall.”

Romantic love was not particularly celebrated in marriage. With rare exceptions, erotic, romantic ideals were the domain of the young and innocent and the older and more cynical. Erotic romance was viewed with suspicion as a form of temporary insanity. Historically, the altered states that explain temporary insanity are mostly passionate anger, extreme grief, intoxication on drugs/alcohol, terror, devastating shame, maniacal loyalty to a person/group/cause, and romantic infatuation.

Over 70% of East Indian college students think an arranged marriage is a good idea, largely because they are somewhat distrustful of decisions made from romantic infatuation (only 17%

American college students think arranged marriage is OK—and how does *that* affect the American divorce rate?).

The 2009 sex scandal with South Carolina governor Mark Sanford is a wonderful example of hundreds of millions of people watching with fascinated horror as a conservative politician committed matrimonial and career suicide while in the throes of romantic infatuation with his mysterious Argentinean mistress. The jokes flew and the stories proliferated, while under the surface simmered the universal understanding that this man had gone love crazy.

Reason #8: In the grip of romantic infatuation, you can't trust what you think. *This is not just a folk aphorism or new-age metaphor. Romantic infatuation literally sedates parts of our brains dedicated to evaluating people and behavior, especially with our lover.*

People become more reckless and impulsive when sexually turned on. This can lead us into crazy social and physical risks resulting in unwanted pregnancy and venereal disease among myriad other potential problems. In the absence of education and dialogue, this impulsivity can catch kids unawares as they crash into adolescence.

I talked about sex and relationships regularly with my kids throughout their development using language that fit their current worldviews, and regaling them with stories of my most stupid decisions. I wanted such conversation to be an integral part of our family life so they would know what to expect and have ideas about how to sexually connect in ways that served everybody. I also used quite a bit of humor. Starting when my oldest, Ethan, was around fourteen, every time he went out with his buddies I'd tell everybody, "Remember to wear a condom." My kids and their friends—not particularly sexually active at this stage—thought this was pretty funny. As they've matured though, most have shown pretty good judgment in sexually turned on situations.

Reason #9: Affairs risk bringing incurable venereal diseases into your marriage such as herpes, papillomavirus (which can sometimes be cured, but dramatically increases risk of cervical cancer), and AIDS.

Reason #10: Affairs risk bringing dangerous but curable venereal diseases into your marriage such as Chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis.

Reason #11: Affairs risk bringing children into the mix.

Sexuality and culture.

When wealth and stability accumulate in a society, human curiosity and creativity accelerate evolution in art, science, and spirituality. Evolution, moving towards novelty, generates individual liberation and expression. Politically free societies tend to embrace—even celebrate—variation in individual/masculine/feminine styles.

On the other hand, empires arising through most recorded history maintain authority and social order partly by controlling how people think and relate—especially sexually. King Henry the Eighth's struggles with the Catholic church over his right to divorce is a good example in the middle ages, while American gays' struggles to be able to officially marry is a more current illustration. Even today in the burgeoning information age, sexual relationships, opinion, thought, and expression are regulated by law and custom to varying degrees in every society.

What about the powerful liberating force of romantic infatuation? As the hierarchical, domination-oriented agrarian societies of the middle ages became more literate, ordered, wealthy, egalitarian, and reason based, romantic infatuation was still rigidly controlled in the young and innocent by parents and church, and the older and more cynical by relegating erotic romance to courtesans, mistresses, and secret affairs.

Fear and caution directed at erotic attachment is understandable. The mythology of all cultures is rife with

cautionary tales of romantic infatuation driving otherwise thoughtful and caring people into egocentric craziness. Genevieve and Lancelot's affair wrecking the golden age of King Arthur and the Round Table is typical. Modern culture gives us true-life examples like Bill and Monica, Mark Sanford, the president of Italy and his eighteen-year-old model paramour, Tiger Woods and his mistresses...the list is endless.

The Enlightenment is as cool as it sounds.

After millennia of societies suppressing women with largely religious justifications, here comes the Enlightenment in the seventeenth-through-nineteenth centuries where rationality gradually trumps religion. Agrarian cultures grew into more technological societies, where—increasingly—human rights were embraced as beautiful and good by enough people to start changing state/cultural policies (with cultures pushing for change as the 10% critical mass showed up in cognitive, values, moral, and interpersonal lines of development).

These evolutionary upheavals led to the liberation movements of the last four hundred years. History has shown us that technology-based societies eventually ban slavery, give women the vote, denounce racism, support free exchange of knowledge and opinion, care for the disabled, and insure gay, lesbian, and transgender citizens legal rights.

Deepening consciousness liberates.

In twentieth century America, a curious juxtaposition of forces constellated to redefine marriage. First of all, the average life expectancy for Americans before the twentieth century was around forty-four. With the advent of modern medicine, average lifespan skyrocketed to early seventies for men, and late seventies for women, adding at least *one extra* adult lifetime for tens—maybe hundreds—of millions. Simultaneously, our legal/cultural systems shifted from men essentially owning women (or at least having more power in most areas), to equal partnerships financially, physically, sexually, and professionally.

The ideals of care and rights for all under the law ushered in the Great Society after WWII, and the “American Dream,” which included societal goals of secure employment, housing, healthcare, schools, and food. As Jean Twinge and Keith Campbell persuasively argue in *The Narcissism Epidemic*, the American Dream subsequently morphed into millions feeling entitled to instant gratification, effortless fame and wealth, and perfect love—leading in part to the reckless spending, narcissistic entitlement, and greed driven collapse of financial institutions in the last fifteen years. This is the dialectic of progress—new capacities generate new problems.

Reason #12: It is complete, narcissistic, egocentric, crazy fallacy to cheat because you “deserve it.” A good rule-of-thumb test for narcissistic entitlement is, “Am I willing to significantly damage others to gratify my cravings?”

Of course the divorce rate shot up. It’s as hard to have a passionate, joyful marriage as to have an honest-to-God democracy where one group can actually vote another group non-violently out of office (the first time this happened *in the history of the world* was the 1800 election between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson—and they liked each other).

That being said, a good marriage is as much better than a bad one as democracy is from fascism.

A big problem is that the maturity, perspectives, and self-regulation required for good marriages are not well understood or systematically taught to children and adolescents. Such material is at best taught intermittently with various cultural blind spots and at worst ignored completely, leaving adults struggling for fulfilling relationships so severely injured or confused that a friend, minister, or doctor eventually asks, “Have you tried therapy?”

For example, John Gottman, famous Seattle couples researcher, has studied “the masters and disasters” of relationships in longitudinal research extending over decades. He’s found a wide variety of conditions that predict divorce or marital satisfaction.

Newlyweds he studied who turned towards their partners 87% of the time when their partners wanted positive attention were still married after six years, while couples who had divorced had only turned toward bids for positive attention around a third of the time. Consistently turning toward to your partner's desires for attention is apparently a *sine qua non* of enduring intimacy.

Another great finding of his research is that couples who can't downregulate negative emotions—soothe themselves and help their spouse calm down when upset—divorce early, on an average of 5.6 years. Couples that don't upregulate positive emotions—cultivate play, fun, romance, and friendly time together—divorce later, at around 16.2 years. This last illustrates how the *absence of conflict* does not necessarily result in stable, happy marriages, there also needs to be the *presence of intimacy and play*.

More relevant to fidelity, Gottman found that people had two general approaches to emotion, *coaching* and *dismissing*. Emotionally coaching people believe emotions are important guides, are curious and communicative about their own and others feelings, and easily ask questions about feeling states, reaching for empathy and collaborative emotionally satisfying interactions. Emotionally dismissing people believe that we can choose our emotions, that negative emotions are dangerous and should be avoided, are convinced painful emotions should not be indulged, and find it admirable to, “suck it up and carry on,” in the face of negative emotional arousal. Dismissing parents especially find their children's negative emotions threatening—they believe it reflects badly on their parenting. Children of emotionally coaching parents tended to be more socially competent, emotionally self-regulating, and academically advanced at eight and fifteen than children of emotionally dismissing parents. All this being said, there are times when it is a good idea to suck it up and carry on, so an optimal balance of coaching and dismissing is what we seek. On the other hand, couples where there was a mismatch in styles—one partner primarily coaching and the other primarily dismissing—

were more likely to divorce, and were more prone to attachment injuries such as *secret affairs*.

Americans are reinterpreting marriage.

Americans—arguably one of the first cultures to have equality of men and women physically, financially, politically, parentally, and sexually—now discover that with these changes comes the need to reinterpret marriage. For instance, one reason modern American men can't comfortably go out with mistresses, prostitutes, or courtesans, is that —by the “fairness” cultural standard—they would then be obligated to tolerate their wives doing the same. Men are not genetically wired to tolerate their chosen woman having sex with another man. Ask any guy who's gone through it—he'll tell you it completely sucks.

Reason #13: Everyone connected will eventually feel horribly painful emotions if you cheat. Sitting home imagining your partner having hot sex with someone else is a horrible experience I wouldn't wish on anybody (yes, I suffered such nights in the seventies and can only just now remember them without cringing too much). Facing a spouse you've cheated on is humiliating and even terrifying. Having a fun affair with a married lover inflicts this kind of suffering on couples and families—something most of us will feel pretty ashamed of when we finally realize what we've done. To say, “yes” to an affair, one must block awareness of these hazards.

The goal of joyful monogamy continues to persist because it's just too wonderful to have a life-partnership defined by special faithfulness, friendship, open sharing, *and deepening eroticism* inside of a tiny—or larger—family tribe. Such relationships deliver exquisite pleasures with numerous benefits including longer life, enhanced health and happiness, children better able to love and thrive, more professional success, and cleaner social networks. Happiness studies routinely report the number one variable associated with a happy life is having satisfying marriage and family relationships.

Even though the work of intimacy can be demanding and overwhelming, we want the connections and payoffs of satisfying monogamy. As we age, most of us increasingly value or yearn for this kind of relationship. In different ways, we seek it with every lover. In marriage we can have this extraordinary union, but only if both partners grow in complementary ways, and only if both eventually sign on for fidelity.

This puts multiple pressures on all of us, but they are good pressures. The world is changing so fast that we need to ride the waves of evolution that envelop us and act through us. We do this better in communion with beloved others. Our most central interpersonal communion is often with our spouse.

Compassion and depth of consciousness inoculate us from secret affairs.

Here's an interesting statistic. As young women have entered the workforce in massive numbers, their rates of infidelity have equaled—sometimes surpassed—men's. On the other hand, I've worked with countless men and women who maintain satisfying marriages while one partner works in relatively promiscuous work environments such as the film industry, academia, and upper level corporate management. These happy people uniformly have what feel like extraordinarily open, accepting, and deep connections with their spouses.

This suggests a human tendency to fall in love with those we are in proximity with, *unless we are protected by depth of consciousness, standards of openness with our spouse, conscious abilities to regulate interpersonal intersubjective energies, and a resolved/blissful relationship.*

David Deida—a visionary leader in the field of masculine/feminine polarity, eroticism, and spirituality—said once that he believed the challenges of erotic drives and impulses at work will eventually result in workplaces segregated by gender, but I disagree. I think that as we learn to manage the energies of our masculine and feminine natures, we'll use the polarities involved

productively in the collective intersubjective relational fields we generate in professional communities.

Meanwhile, to have a successful, satisfying marriage in our equal-power/extra-lifetime world often requires consistently expanding depth of consciousness, knowledge, and resolve, to support growth, love, and passion. Like democracy, this is hard to achieve, but magnificent to accomplish. The kind of equality, honesty, and transparency that such superior relationships need is not compatible with secret affairs where one partner feels entitled to cheat, lie, and hide.

Reason #14: When we have zero tolerance to cheat, lie, and hide, we become better people generally. Which of your friends do you most admire? Whom do you seek out when you're hurt and need support? I suspect you don't turn to the liars and cheaters in your social circle, but instead to the honorable and caring people whom you trust to have integrity, tell the truth, and support clean love. When your friends need support, which of those two groups do you want to them to consider you a member of? Cultivating zero tolerance for cheating, lying, and hiding moves you toward the integrity end of the spectrum.

Evolutionary psychology: interpretations and misinterpretations.

We evolved from super-chimpanzees who lived in hunter-gatherer tribal groups with about as much culture as chimps and gorillas have today—which is to say, not much. About two hundred thousand years ago there was a mutation on the human FOXP2 gene that gave us the capacities for grammar and symbolic communication, which basically kicked us up about a hundred miles on the self-aware consciousness scale and resulted in human civilization. Grammar means we can consider—can *self-reflect* on—“I,” “you,” and, “we,” in the past present and future. Symbolic communication means we can imagine *almost anything* and communicate it to some extent with others.

Language and self-awareness, like all new capacities, included and transcended previous ones. In other words, the new cultures that arose with self-awareness—I, we, you in the past present and future, plus imaginative abilities to create whole new universes and share infinitely different perspectives—were constructed on—and integrated with—the super-chimpanzee biology and society which preceded them. We are actually more like bonobos—chimps’ gentler cousins—but we still have hard wired aggression, dominance, affiliation, child tending, sexuality, fight/flight responses, and tendencies to establish and maintain distorted habits of thought and behavior.

We are born with these drives and tendencies and do pretty well when we integrate them with our developing self-awareness and current cultures—as in rule-based athletic contests like football and basketball rather than bloody tribal wars for meeting needs to advance our social group. People get pretty worked up over the excesses, lies, attacks, and distortions of the American political process, but consider the alternatives of murder, armed rebellion, conquest, and “might makes right.”

Such integration/sublimation works much better than denial/suppression, as in, “I don’t care what other people think, so I’ll do whatever I want.” “I don’t care what other people think,” is never true unless “I” am a sociopath, who views others as objects to be used.

I care what you think about me and I bet you care what I think about you. If you doubt this, just imagine the following two scenarios:

- I think you *personally* are a rotten person. This probably hurts, or at least irritates a little.
- Now consider how I believe *you* have a unique life and sacred myth you embody that is beautiful and important. This probably feels much better.

Reason #15: Critical social judgments about your infidelity will harm you. Almost everybody disapproves of cheating. The

inevitable condemnations you'll suffer from your affair will hurt emotionally, threaten you professionally, and disrupt you socially.

We do miserably deny genetic imperatives and try to excise them from our beings, as in a wife denying jealousy, or a guilty adolescent boy trying hopelessly to stop his masturbation habit.

If we are to have passionate and satisfying monogamy, and if we are to deal productively with impulses to engage in secret affairs, it's a good idea to explore our genetic tendencies, and what is possible in shaping them into superior and satisfying lover relationships. Let's start with male and female eroticism.

Male eroticism: "I see her I want her."

On a genetic level, men and women are wired for both polygamy (which includes multiple wives—polygamy—and multiple husbands—polyandry) and monogamy. Men are biologically drawn to the female form—guys in some experiments have had attraction reactions to simple, abstract hourglass figures—and healthy, youthful, fecund females. Clear skin implies health. High hips to waist ratio suggests childbearing capacities (70% to 30% hips to waist ratio tests as optimally attractive). Blond hair implies youth. A smile feels like an invitation, especially if it's over the shoulder, implying the rear entry sexual position favored by most mammals (it's not only dogs that like "doggy style"). Male eroticism tends to be heavily visual—the "see her I want sex with her" instinct.

Reason #16: "Sexy" doesn't equal "sane." *Just because a woman is erotically radiant and apparently available, doesn't mean she is stable, faithful, compatible, or honest. Enjoy your see-her-want-sex instincts, but be cautious.*

Men tend to claim certain women as their "own" and will go into paroxysms of jealousy if "my" woman has sex, or looks like she might have sex, with another, often *even if I myself am having—or desire to have—sex with other women*. David Deida calls this "exclusionary jealousy." Men will bond with a woman, have

children with her, and be fiercely protective and sexually possessive, especially while the children are small. Women, more stability/security oriented, are more prone to “discriminative jealousy” where they tend to be especially alarmed if they think their man is “falling in love” with another woman (partially explaining the cultural normalization *by women* of prostitution throughout the ages—the contract of sex-without-love for money is preferable to the threat of my man falling in love with another woman). Perhaps this is why men are often less threatened by what appears to be a *non-sexual* intimacy their wife has with another man, while women are more likely to be upset by their husbands developing friendships with certain women, especially those she feels broadcast sexual availability.

Noted sexual researcher, Helen Fisher, observing that many divorces happen after four years or so of marriage (half of all divorces happen within the first seven years of marriage), speculates that four years is just about the time it takes for babies to become somewhat self-sufficient little kids, thus freeing a man to feel less responsible for a family, and a woman to be less anxious about needing a male presence to protect and provide for her and a vulnerable infant or toddler. This corresponds interestingly to the fact that, even though 67% of marriages end in divorce within forty years, half of those divorces happen during the first seven years of marriage. It’s easy to see stress points—pregnancies, births, the first four years of raising each child, increasing responsibilities of family—as fault lines where a partner might be vulnerable to the apparently easy pleasure of an affair.

Reason #17: Crises are best used to support relational growth.

Marital stress points are often milestones for development if resolved into deeper love. They can strengthen and enrich marriages. A man meeting the challenges of a growing family can feel a mature masculine power, and deeper gratitude and appreciation for his partner/lover/coparent in the adventure of marriage. A woman maintaining an ongoing love affair with her husband while raising children and dealing with life stressors can

have the warm sense of cocreating the dream of fulfilled family love. Stress points which collapse into infidelity tend to doom participants to a boring cycle. You labor up through a particular developmental challenge—perhaps marrying, becoming a parent, or progressing from romantic infatuation into intimate bonding, but then collapse into a familiar breakdown—a secret affair—starting the whole cycle over again.

Female eroticism: I am beautiful, the sexy embodiment of the feminine. Take me when I want to be taken. Ravish me when I most crave ravishment. Let's cozy up and see what happens. I want a powerful masculine presence to know me, claim me, and make me feel secure. When I'm secure, I yearn for *him*—my romantic ideal—to sweep me off my feet...

Yes, female eroticism is complicated. *At least* three different systems—probably more—circulate simultaneously, acting in different ways depending upon—among other factors—life stage, relationship stage, biologic imperatives, cultural conditioning, personality structure, and hormonal fluctuations:

- Women tend to get turned on by feeling beautiful and sexy and imagining themselves the object of desire. If the right man communicates desire *in the right way at the right time*, “I’m beautiful and desirable,” switches on. Marta Meana of the University of Nevada at Los Vegas suggests that embodying the erotically irresistible Goddess is a central player in arousal. This is partly due to the attraction of both men and women to feminine beauty, and the essential ambiguity of the naked female form. Is she aroused? Unlike a naked man, it’s hard to say, and since a naked woman is both an unusual and attractive image, men will tend to fixate and desire, while women—if not distracted by disapproval or shame emotions at seeing a woman break cultural taboos—will tend to identify and feel sexy.
- Meredith Chivers, a Toronto based sex researcher, studied men and women watching sexual scenes of all types. She

showed them sexually explicit film clips of heterosexual couples, gay and lesbian couples, individuals masturbating, and individual naked men and women. She even threw in bonobos having sex (I imagine it's fun to be a sex researcher sometimes). As men and women watched the videos, Chivers had them rate how turned on they were while she monitored their levels of physiological sexual arousal with vaginal plethysmograph measuring women's blood flow to their vaginas, and penile plethysmographs measuring men's blood flow to their penises. Cameras also recorded where people's eyes tracked on the screens. Women experienced arousal as their eyes moved from the naked body of the woman—with whom they were presumably identifying—to the eyes of the male partner gazing at his lover with desire. The guys predictably looked mostly at the naked women (though gay males looked primarily at the naked men). When interviewed later, it was further confirmed that women identified with the beautiful naked woman desired by the aroused man. Also, while the men's self-reported levels of arousal more or less matched the plethysmographs, the women's reporting was often wildly at odds with their plethysmograph readings. For example, women often self-reported more arousal than the instruments showed while watching the heterosexual sex, and less arousal than the instruments showed while watching the lesbian sex. Other research has shown that easily orgasmic women and women who take their time with the ebbs and flows of eroticism in masturbation or lovemaking are more accurate in knowing when they are turned on.

Reason #18: Your wife will be less turned on, less generous, and feel unattractive if you cheat. Anger blocks arousal. Your wife is likely to feel less aroused with you if she's pissed off at you for cheating. She'll also feel less attractive, because, if you really wanted her, why did you stray? Similarly, if you've been cheating on your husband and look sexy, he'll likely associate his attraction

with your hot sex with another man and become threatened and furious, both of which tend to block his desire for you.

- Women tend to get turned on by feeling cozy, snuggly, and sensual with a safe partner. You cuddle up on the couch together, put on the romantic comedy, idly hold and caress, and eroticism shows up. Sex researcher Lisa Diamond thinks this is why women can bond more easily sexually with both men and women than straight or gay men. Warm intimacy into sensuality into eroticism—independent of gender—seems more available to a woman’s biology and consciousness.

Reason #19: Nobody feels very cozy, snuggly, and sensual with someone who has catastrophically screwed them over.

- Women tend to get turned on by a resolved, powerful man confidently claiming them sexually. This is great when he’s doing it *just when you want him to*, but it also explains the bewilderment and shame of women who have had arousal and even orgasm while being raped. This is a genetically wired mechanism that enabled our distant female ancestors to safely surrender to a physically dominating male while minimizing risk of injury. A turned on woman’s body is not as likely to be injured by unwanted penetration. An aggressive male in his peaceful refractory period immediately following orgasm—which tends to mellow all men somewhat, even rapists—is less likely to want to do violence to a woman if she has not fought back and has become aroused during the process. All that being said, in one study 50% of women had a fantasy of being ravished by an attractive, powerful, assertive man in the last month. The sweep-me-off-my-feet-and-ravish-me arousal system is clearly part of the female arousal puzzle.

Reason #20: Blissful ravishment requires trust and attunement. A woman has to have enormous trust to surrender to ravishment. A man needs to be attuned and generous to ravish his partner open

deliciously. Such trust, attunement, and generosity are compromised by lies and betrayals.

- Women are drawn to focused, powerful men of high social standing, but also to safety and security. Age of the man is much less relevant than his presence and power. Further, even though early in relationships women cooperate with partners to create security and stability, once they feel established and have passed from romantic infatuation into intimate bonding, they are again drawn to other high status men. In one study in Switzerland, ten percent of the children of stably married women had been fathered by another man. UC Riverside biologist Marlene Zuk—condensing social research in the area—concludes that in the general U.S. population one to four percent of children of married women are fathered by another man. It looks like a significant number of women, when security of relationship with a spouse is established, seek outside liaisons with attractive and/or high-status guys. I assume this is why Henry Kissinger was at the top of “most attractive” men lists in his day, and Madeline Albright was never considered on babe lists (though I’ll bet she’s really hot under the right circumstances). Similarly, I assume this is why the Brad Pitts and Paul Newmans of the world are desired by women, somewhat independent of what it might actually be like to be in relationship with them.

Paul Newman sidebar: *A woman walked into an ice cream store in New England one day and ordered an ice cream cone. As her cone was handed to her, she noticed that the man standing next to her was Paul Newman—a major Brad Pitt level heart-throb in her day. He made polite conversation as she paid, thrilling her no end. When she turned to leave, she realized that she was no longer holding her cone. As she looked about in confusion, Paul Newman smiled at her and said, “You put it in your purse.”*

Mirror neurons amplify romantic infatuation.

If you and I look into each other's eyes, motor neurons in our brains—mirror neurons, discovered in humans by Italian neuroscientist Marco Iacoboni in the nineties—will fire in synchrony with one another, giving each of us a sense of the other's states of consciousness, including intentionality. This resonant process influences us toward complementary actions. You reach for a cup of water, I'll subtly feel like doing the same. You smile at me, I'm moved to smile back. You appear kindly, and I feel more kind.

Mirror neurons are clearly centrally involved in the power of social modeling, the incredible dance of infant/mother attachment, the apparently miraculous connections we routinely experience with our most intimate others, and why two people can exchange so much information in such a short period of time when they first meet. A revealing study had one group of individuals meet another person for three seconds, and another group know someone for five weeks. Both groups eventually had essentially identical opinions of the people they met.

Mirror neurons mean you can hide facts from your spouse, but not states of consciousness. If states of consciousness in a marriage don't harmonize and feel authentic, love suffers. If the problems that arise from this disharmony aren't resolved into deeper intimacy and transparency, the discomfort of disconnection moves people to try to force connection through coercion like complaining, demanding, criticizing, and whining—activities that repulse partners. Coercion also motivates partners to avoid one another, causing lifeless marriages and spouses who don't talk or even look very much into each other's eyes.

Reason #21: Mirror neurons make hiding everything impossible.
Looking at your spouse while suffering from the guilt, anger, shame, or fear associated with secret affairs will resonate in his or her brain via mirror neurons—one reason conflicted couples instinctively avoid eye contact, and chronic liars learn to look

earnestly into people's eyes. Such avoidance feels threatening to your partner's nervous system, activating defensive systems that relate to you as a threat—which feels threatening to you. The healthy repair response of talking about exactly what is going on in the present moment with transparency and acceptance in service of love is not available because of your secrets. Coldness and nastiness follow, creating downward spirals of bad times.

If you meet someone attractive, his or her mirror neurons subtly reveal your interest, and vice versa. If erotic polarity is evoked and reciprocated, your expressions and bodies unconsciously fall into the dance of flirtation. This dance is great *if you are aware of it and regulate it for the highest good*. In the absence of effective self-regulation, flirting can be a risky step on the slippery slope of attraction, affiliation, and erotic injury.

Simple awareness of attraction is often surprisingly difficult due to social prohibitions against being conscious of sexuality. Boys and girls are conditioned to be ashamed of sexual arousal and hide it. Adolescents get some permission to feel aroused in specific circumstances, like making out at parties while intoxicated. Mostly though, men and women—especially women—risk social censure with overt sexual arousal, a recipe for learning how to reflexively *tune out* sexual arousal. This might partially explain the Meredith Chivers studies I quoted earlier showing women physically aroused in various situations while not conscious of the extent they're turned on.

Developmentally, this suggests complicated arousal mechanisms in women that include capacities to dissociate from—automatically block out—erotic feelings in response to cultural prohibitions and other learning. If we wish to cultivate caring sexual awareness in our children, we probably need to normalize and openly discuss sexual arousal, age appropriate sexual activity, and the complex social interplay of erotic energies in our families. The idea that explicit information about sex is “bad for kids” who must be “protected” from knowledge about their own sexuality and how it develops reflects a destructive cultural blind spot left over

from our agrarian roots of dominating populaces by controlling their sexuality.

To further complicate matters, arousal is just part of our complex, dynamic attraction systems. Most of us tend to be drawn to certain types of people, and this can change in different social contexts and states of consciousness.

Who are we attracted to?

Statistically, we tend to be attracted to people like us. We gravitate towards people of our age, race, economic status, cultural history, financial position, and geographic area. Helen Fisher—in research funded by Match.com—found four types of people whom she characterizes as being driven by brain systems dominated by dopamine/norepinephrine, serotonin, testosterone, or estrogen. Everyone has all four systems, but the ratios of emphasis determine types. She found people tended to pair bond in particular combinations. Briefly, the types are:

The Explorer/artisan—dopamine/norepinephrine—exhibits novelty seeking, creativity, playfulness, self-reliance, mania, and recklessness. Indiana Jones.

The Builder/guardian—serotonin—seems cautious, community oriented, calm, patient, stoical, stubborn, and close-minded. Hillary Clinton.

The Director/rational—testosterone—is analytical, tough-minded, emotionally contained, competitive, impatient and uncompromising. John McCain.

The Negotiator/idealist—estrogen—is holistic, imaginative, with good people skills, introspective, placating, nosy, and unforgiving. Barak Obama.

- Explorers are drawn to novelty-seeking, excitement-craving explorers.
- Builders are drawn to communitarian, sensible, security conscious builders.

- Directors and negotiators—having complementary big-picture/little picture, action/evaluation, acting out/smoothing over tendencies—are drawn to each other more than their own types.

In general, women tend to be attracted to men four inches taller and three and a half years older, who project material success and high social status. When “in love” women have more sensitivity to gut feelings, and activation of attention and memory circuits than men.

Men tend to be attracted to younger women (on average two and a half years younger) with clear skin, bright eyes, full lips, shiny hair, and an hourglass figure. “In love” men have high activation in visual processing areas on their brains. The predominant male eroticism is visual—“I see her I want her.”

Hugging, cuddling, kissing, gazing, emotionally positive talk, and orgasm release oxytocin in both men and women, which amplifies trust. In men, orgasm also causes surges of vasopressin, which boosts energy, attention, affiliation, possessiveness, and aggression.

Men are drawn to sexual bonding after intense stress, while women resist sexual contact after stress—due almost certainly to the fact that elevated levels of the stress hormone cortisol block the action of oxytocin, a primary bonding hormone. That being said, low stress/high excitement activities like roller coasters pump up dopamine in men and women, which tends to increase the chances of both of us getting lucky later that night.

***Male/female arousal caveat:** Even though research shows distinct male/female differences in arousal systems, I’ve found plenty of men and women clients turned on through any or all of the arousal systems. Some women get off on aggressively ravishing her husband, and some men get off on being ravished. Some women are visually aroused by naked men, and some men get off on being worshipped as the embodiment of erotic perfection. Most people*

seem to have different combinations of arousal systems depending on partner, relationship, and state of consciousness.

Here comes culture again. Men and women have different patterns of self-acceptance. For example, culturally homophobic American men are often ashamed of homosexual arousal—or passive roles in heterosexual sex, or cross-dressing thrills, or fetishes etc—while Lisa Diamond’s research suggests women move more easily from intimacy to erotic arousal with other women.

The current consensus of sex researchers seems to be that the male arousal system is simpler than the female one, but my personal/clinical experience has left me with doubts. I’ve worked with plenty of men who love feeling the attractive embodiment of masculine beauty, who move from cozy to turned-on, and who love the idea of being ravished by a sexually voracious partner. I suspect men’s ten to a hundred times more testosterone amplifies the “see her want her” system so much it masks other arousal processes. Certainly gay couples report all the arousal systems mentioned so far, sometimes with both partners getting off on multiple roles.

Clearly, there are powerful and complex biochemical/psychosocial systems in all of us simmering below the surface, piqued by attraction, and exploding as we erotically bond.

Promoters and Resisters.

Long-term couples frequently create an ongoing promoter/resister tension around sex. One partner—the promoter—wants more frequent and varied sex, and advocates, coerces, complains, or criticizes to try to “get my needs met.” The other partner—the resister—dislikes being pressured, wants to have sex when it “feels right,” and resents “demands,” from the promoter.

The ensuing tension between a promoter’s sense of powerless frustration and resister’s sense of nagging harassment can take on a life of its own, obscuring the original issue of not being able to comfortably talk about sexuality and create steady progress towards mutual fulfillment. In other words, the romantic/sexual

relationship becomes *about the sexual conflict* rather than *creating love* through romance and eroticism.

Resisters *who self-righteously refuse* to be more sexually active in response to promoter complaints believe the main marital problem is the promoter who can't "love me for who I am." Resisters *who angrily comply* with promoter sexual demands tend to have diminished enjoyment of sex and increasingly feel it a duty and a form of "selling myself out."

Promoters *who keep hammering* for more sex believe the main problem is the resister who refuses to "have a normal sex life." Promoters *who give up* on more satisfying lover relationships nurse secret resentments for years, and respond to sexually/romantically charged experiences by feeling unfairly deprived by resister partners—sexual/romantic cues include social flirting, movies, books, magazine covers—erotic images and references are everywhere—and can increasingly be sources of discomfort, turning into arguments about sex and culture, taking the couple further from intimacy.

One study showed men in their twenties thinking about sex every 53 seconds, while *in love* twenty-something women thought about sex several times a day, and not-in-love women once a day. This is probably due to men having ten to a hundred times more testosterone—the "I want sex now" hormone—than women. Given this data, it's not surprising that—in general—men with their higher testosterone levels and "I see I want" sexuality are more prone to be promoters, but not always. Women with less testosterone, more complicated arousal systems, and more profoundly conflicting cultural messages about sexuality, are generally more likely to be resisters, but not always.

Regardless of gender, unresolved resister/promoter conflict drains the life out of romantic relationships.

Neither promoter nor resister is having a joyful, fulfilling marital love affair, and each becomes progressively more vulnerable to a secret affair. It's easy to see why. To a resister for

whom sex has become a battleground, to *feel attracted and attractive* to a lover you *yearn to have sex with* can be wonderful and validating. “O my God! I do have a libido. I am a sexy woman. I feel sexually alive again.” To a promoter to find a hot lover *who wants you sexually* can be intoxicating beyond belief. “I am attractive. This is the best sex of my life. A beautiful, radiant woman wants *me*.”

Both the promoter and resister experience is driven by the biochemistry and cultural standards of romantic infatuation and intimate bonding.

Max:

Max is a conservative financial advisor, dedicated parent, enthusiastic runner, and a likeable guy. People—men and women both—instinctively trust him and his judgment, and one of his best professional and personal strengths is his genuine warmth. When I first met him, he confessed to a secret life as womanizer who blindly followed attraction straight into sexual engagement without much thought. He was somewhat of a resister sexually with his wife, but a promoter with his lovers. This is a not uncommon combination for a man who finds that transgressive sex liberates him to objectify and pursue a lover in ways that don’t feel interesting or right with his wife—the mother of his children, the embodiment of a different moral system.

Max came to me feeling overwhelmed by his current affair, a woman he evaluated as over-the-top crazy. “I love my wife, Keith. I enjoy our sex. But there’s something about Dawn [his secret lover] that is irresistible. I keep telling her we have to stop, but then I think about her and have to call—or she’ll call me and I have to go over. I want her more than I can bear sometimes.”

Romantic infatuation, lover obsession, and love.

Sparking with another, leading to flirting, leading to relating, leading to becoming lovers, activates romantic infatuation that leave us intoxicated *specifically* with our lover. Romantic

infatuation shares brain circuits with obsessive states, mania, intoxication, thirst, and hunger. During romantic infatuation, anxiety and evaluation systems are turned way down, and lovers—especially women—report a partner’s faults don’t seem to matter much when she’s, “In love.”

The neurochemicals mediating these pleasurable states are oxytocin, estrogen, vasopressin, dopamine, and testosterone. Elevations of women’s oxytocin and estrogen promote socializing and pair bonding. Vasopressin influences men to be close to and possess/protect lovers. Dopamine is a “feel good” neurotransmitter elevated by alcohol, recreational drugs, play, discovery of fun new things, and sexual attraction. Testosterone makes everybody want to have sex, compete more effectively, and kick ass if threatened.

Max knew Dawn was a disaster waiting to happen, but kept calling her anyway. Romantic infatuation impairs judgment. People get more impulsive, reckless, and less thoughtful when they’re sexually turned on. Romantic infatuation lasts from a few hours to a couple of years, some say six to eighteen months. This biochemically “in love” period is intensely absorbing, stressful, and outrageously pleasurable. Sixty percent of books sold in America are romance novels involving heroine after heroine entering states of romantic infatuation with attractive, safe, deep, confident men. On the testosterone side, men’s sexual fantasies mostly involve images of beautiful, sexually radiant women engaging in hot sex with powerful, attractive *me*.

We all *really like* romantic infatuation. Unfortunately, it passes as couples grow closer and enter the intimate bonding stage of relationship, which paradoxically involves feeling more committed in many ways while feeling less sexually hot and urgent (more oxytocin and vasopressin, less testosterone and dopamine). Marital sexuality *can* keep getting better, but only if a couple has the knowledge, abilities, and will to persevere as relationships mature and challenges arise.

Let's normalize blissful marriages, not marriage failures.

Max once asked me, “Keith, what’s the difference between a prostitute, a mistress, and a wife?” When I threw up my hands, he said enthusiastically, “A prostitute says, ‘faster, faster, faster,’ a mistress says, ‘slower, slower, slower,’ and a wife says, ‘I think I’ll paint the ceiling blue.’” This was poignantly funny to Max because it reflected his cultural standard of diminished eroticism in marriage and the impossibility of stable marital sexual bliss.

Our culture is *miserable* at teaching kids and teens the principles of what fulfilling, sexually satisfying marriage is and how to do it. The self-help and marriage counseling communities should offer profound thanks to our Puritan ancestors, 21st century marriage demands, and lack of relational training. Due to these and other social factors, people hit adolescence already unnecessarily conditioned and suffering. These bad habits cause lots of problems. Ideally, we process bad habits through self-reflective transformation to support and strengthen stable, blissful marriages.

Reason #22: Practicing bad habits strengthens them. Secret affairs involve practicing bad habits of lying, indulging reckless impulses, and blocking out sick consequences of wrong actions. Every time we indulge a bad habit, we strengthen neural circuits associated with it.

Given the overwhelming pleasure and urgency of romantic infatuation and our genetically driven tendencies to create it, everybody yearns for erotic romance. The lack of understanding of what it is and how to work with it in marriage creates the message to many people that romantic infatuation equals being “in love,” that there’s not much you can do when it’s “lost,” and one of the only ways to “have love in your life” without losing your family is to have an affair.

I beg to disagree.

A couple that *consciously* deepens both friendship *and* romantic/sexual relationship as they progress into the intimate bonding stage can pretty much have it all. This deepening is based

on honesty, mutual care, and authentic interest in serving each other as friends, lovers, and life-partners.

Enjoyable distractions, distracting attractions, and the dance of erotic polarity.

Becky and I were walking through the parking lot at Hendry's Beach Park in Santa Barbara a while ago, on our way to our favorite beach walk. It was late on a summer afternoon, and people were beginning to leave after a long, languorous day of sun, water, and hanging out with friends. Walking up from the stairs was a group of four young women. Three of them had shirts, sundresses, or other outfits you use to cover up as you leave the beach. One blond woman had on nothing but her tiny bikini barely clinging her lush young body. She was clearly luxuriating in being the center of all male attention within a radius of fifty yards, and was swinging happily through the parking lot, the embodiment of feminine erotic perfection, a big smile on her face, and laughter bubbling up regularly as she talked animatedly with her girlfriends.

I can still see her in my memory, and feel my reactions as I watch her dancing along the path. *"I want her right now."* Becky, who is wise in these areas, looked at me with sympathy. She knew what I was going through. My limbic system was demanding I possess this woman. My wiser self prevailed of course—it is a skill all men have to learn or court total disaster. What's significant is that I feel no injury from the incident, no lingering longing for that young blond goddess, no frustration with Becky for not being this particular flavor of the feminine ideal. On balance, this was an *enjoyable attraction*, a random enlivenment from the feminine to me that left me energized and entertained. She was a gift from the divine goddess to me, and I offered appreciative worship, attending with amusement and desire for a few seconds.

Distracting attractions are when people suffer from frustrated desire. If I fantasized with longing about his woman, returned to Hendry's repeatedly in hopes of seeing or meeting her, or felt angry and dissatisfied with Becky because she was not this particular

erotic paragon, the experience would have an entirely different meaning to me, Becky, and possibly the young woman.

Distracting attractions can be acknowledged and processed to improve marriages—we'll explore ways this can be done later. Unfortunately, distracting attractions are often guiltily suppressed, or surreptitiously pursued into secret affairs.

Attraction, arousal, and erotic relationships are complicated.

Researchers, therapists, and authors love to talk, speculate, and write about arousal and romance. A central dynamic of arousal and romance catches someone's attention and expands into a thesis about how eroticism *really* works. For example:

- Esther Perel, author of *Mating in Captivity*, noticed in her therapy practice in New York City that erotic charge often diminished as couples became more intimate and familiar with each other. She concluded from this and her studies of other arousal theorists—many psychoanalytically oriented—that a certain strangeness or separateness is required for arousal. Perel maintains, “Sexual desire does not obey the laws that maintain peace and contentment between partners.” She believes, “Aggression, objectification, and power all exist in the shadow of desire...” and that when intimacy collapses into fusion, too much closeness impedes desire. She found that couples who introduced, “emotional space,” into their relationships had some success reigniting erotic arousal. One of her hypotheses is that safe intimate bonding can cue fears of engulfment that stifle erotic interest. Her approach mirrors David Schnarch's *Passionate Marriage* assumption that partners grow—or “differentiate”—to support growth cycles, which ultimately turn conflict into deeper intimacy. His hypothesis is that confronting difficult problems in marriage can release energy into hotter eroticism.
- David Deida sees arousal as a function of erotic polarity between a masculine pole and feminine pole (more on this in Chapter Three). The more distance between these poles, the

- more erotic charge. Knowing your sexual essence as more masculine or feminine, and expressing that essence through your spirit and body enhances sexual polarity. Erotically fulfilled relationships—in the sexual occasion—involve one partner (male or female) fully occupying a feminine aspect while the other fully occupies a masculine aspect.
- Some sociologists see diminishment of feminine desire as a common consequence of sexual trauma as well as intimate bonding, and diagnose up to thirty percent of American women as having “hypoactive sexual desire” syndrome. They suggest “treatment” for this “disorder” if women are distressed by it. Interestingly, many researchers seem to automatically accept an implied standard that “good” sex always involves desire leading to arousal. This is certainly consistent with what many caring parents say who actually discuss sex with their kids. “Don’t say ‘yes’ unless you want to,” is a great message for teens, but in the absence of instruction on developmental stages and expanding eroticism in monogamy, this message can lead women to feel there’s something wrong with them if they find themselves in a life stage where—mostly—arousal leads to desire. Similarly, no matter how beautiful their partners are, men’s nervous systems are attracted to sexual novelty. A man can become less automatically aroused by the sight and feel of a familiar lover, leading him to question his masculinity and depth of love. Happy couples past the romantic infatuation stage have often transcended these cultural messages, reporting mutually satisfying sex using arousal as a path to desire, mindful practice to sustain sexual novelty.
 - In my experience as a psychotherapist, the roadblock to increasing sexual desire is often one or both partner’s unwillingness to examine defensive states which inhibit thinking about arousal, talking with partners about arousal, or consistently experimenting with what they think, do, and say in the interest of enhancing hot sex.

- Helen Fisher—anchored as she is in the biochemistry of attraction, sexual urgency, and intimate bonding, and the typologies of Explorer, Builder, Director, and Negotiator, suggests arousal is enhanced by mutual risk taking and physical contact. Novelty seeking stimulates surges in dopamine to support romantic infatuation, and touching and lovemaking stimulate oxytocin and vasopressin production to support bonding. The “risk taking” and “novelty seeking” parts of this might explain why transgressive sex like secret affairs can feel so pleasurable. Breaking rules feels risky, thus potentially cueing surges of fun-neurotransmitter dopamine through our brains.

I love this community of perspectives. Apparently arousal is mediated by genetically driven biochemistry, masculine and feminine dynamics, stages in the life cycle of a relationship, family dynamics, the presence or absence of defensive states, social mores, a balance of fusion and differentiation, and sexualized learning that amps or numbs emotional, visual, relational, tactile, and environmental cues.

It’s complicated.

Humans are wired for monogamy and infidelity, and each of us has our unique constellation of constantly shifting and morphing arousal states and associations, intersubjectively harmonizing with others, and cued by perceptions, internal associations, and conditioning. All this *changes dramatically* with personal and relational development.

The Bad News.

The bad news is that each of us is intricate and unique erotically with a tangled set of drives, yearnings, reactions, values, and associations, all influencing and being influenced by life stages, relationships, and states of consciousness. Each facet of this system is a vulnerable point that can malfunction and block erotic intimacy.

The Good News.

The good news is that—given this rich complexity—a couple seeking to enhance arousal/satisfaction can probably discover paths to bliss.

The problem with affairs is that they appear to be shortcuts to frisson. Struggling to enhance arousal with a spouse is often—at least initially—irritating, threatening, and tedious. Sparking with a new lover and diving into the river of secret-affair abandon generates peak pleasures and easy arousal. Why should I explore my personal history, defenses, and relationships, take on conflicts with my spouse, cultivate compassion and patience for all *her* hang-ups, just for the *chance* of hotness, when I can do it *so effortlessly* with my secret lover?

Reason #23: Lost in the pleasures of a secret affair, you can't improve eroticism with your spouse. If you can "go out shopping, meet your lover, and have passionate sex, are you really going to struggle with your husband or wife to incrementally revitalize a sex life that both of you have mostly forsaken? I don't think so. I've known people who have tried, and it has never worked.

So, why monogamy?

This is tricky. Monogamy works for me, so am I projecting my moral standards onto you?

Possibly. But as people develop on their psychosocial lines of development, they don't become *more* likely to cheat. They become *less* likely to lie, cheat, or blame others for their defenses.

Whatever your current relationship, if it keeps *getting better* there's more mutual understanding and acceptance. If you're better *as lovers* there's more effortless hotness. Mutual development leads you and your spouse to enjoy progressive awakenings and increasingly admire—even worship your best selves.

Consider the possibilities of everything we've discussed in this chapter making your marriage better. You use your extra lifetime to

create an increasing love with one person that inspires everyone. You stay attuned to your marriage when desire wanes or conflict waxes, and insist on resolving conflicts into deeper love, differentiation, connection, and erotic bliss. You use knowledge of male and female erotic programming to enhance mutual sexual/romantic fulfillment, while becoming wiser and more adept in the ways of men and women.

But, we all know this stuff, right? Ask anybody if it's a good idea to go out on someone and they'll tell you, "No way!" So, how does it happen? How do 25% of men and 15% of women end up cheating, and many more lie, flirt, hide, and wander? We'll explore these questions in Chapter Two, "The theory of loopholes: how an affair happens."

CHAPTER TWO: THE THEORY OF LOOPHOLES: HOW AN AFFAIR HAPPENS.

Susan.

Susan is a thirty-one-year-old graphic artist, married for three years to a software engineer. She is referred to me by her primary care M.D. who has diagnosed her hypertensive (she has chronic high blood pressure) without any apparent physical cause. Susan walks into my office wearing a short dress, sensible shoes, opal earrings, and a delicious gardenia perfume. She has an adorable smile—especially when I compliment her earrings—and I feel a sexual tingle as she sits down and lets me get her a cup of tea. She is radiating the kind of energy women do when they are in the throes of romantic infatuation. This sounds like fun for a therapist, and I guess it is pleasurable to be intimately talking to a beautiful woman radiating erotic light. On the other hand, my stomach lurches with a slight sick dread over what this probably means, given her wedding ring and high blood pressure. I think to myself, *“If she and her husband are willing to do the work, a long, painful, healing journey stretches ahead for the next two or three years. And that’s the best possible outcome.”*

As Susan tells me the hypertensive story, I ask about her husband, David. Susan looks down to her left and says, “He’s a good guy, but he’s pretty clueless about who I really am.”

When she finally glances up at me, I look her steadily in the eyes and ask her, “Are you seeing someone else?” which elicits a quick progression of shock, fear, guilt, and *relief*. She doesn’t consciously know it, but, for an honorable woman like Susan, having a secret affair violates internal moral codes so dramatically it becomes literally sickening, and confessing to an authority relieves tension and isolation. She takes a deep breath and says, “Yes, I’ve been in love with another man for the past year.”

Reason #24: Secret affairs stress bodies. *The pressure of the double life wears on you, and can make you sick, like Susan's hypertension.*

Masculine/feminine erotic polarity.

All of us have a masculine side that is focused, linear, based in depth, steady, success driven, resolved to be true to our life's purpose, who enjoys leading a radiant feminine partner in the dance of eroticism. Think Krishna, or Brad Pitt.

All of us have a feminine side based in bodily pleasures, relationships, nature, communion, love, in tune with the moment, who enjoys offering devotional love to a trustable masculine presence in the dance of eroticism. Think Avalokiteśvara, Green Tara, Aphrodite, Venus, and Michelle Obama.

Sexually, most people are more masculine or more feminine, though we can swing back and forth on the continuum from pure love/life/relationship/body/surrender to pure consciousness/purpose/integrity/mission. In other words, each of us is a unique amalgam of masculine and feminine aspects, with a more deeply masculine or feminine sexual essence in our lover relationships.

When a more masculine person is in the presence of a more feminine person, an arc of erotic polarity sparks. Often these energies are pleasurable as with Susan and her lover, and with me and Susan. Sometimes they are shameful and disgusting. Loyal spouses are ashamed of impulses to stray. We are horrified at sexual fantasies that turn us on but violate our values. I always wonder about conservative heterosexual men being extra repulsed by effeminate homosexual men who enjoy being followers in the sexual dance—often called “bottoms” in the homosexual community. Anti-gay rants sometimes cause me to raise my eyebrows and remember Shakespeare's, “...doth protest too much.” Either way, erotic polarity naturally constellates between masculine and feminine the way positive and negative leads spark from a car battery.

Reason #25: An affair makes you a hypocrite. *You publicly espouse a set of sexual values, and privately violate them. This slows your development, makes you more rigid socially, and elicits contempt when you are found out.*

Consider a more masculine person and a more feminine person in the same room. If the more masculine person feels erotic light directed at *him*, while the feminine person feels masculine integrity directed at *her*, knowing and wanting *her*, sexual attraction sparks—pleasurably if it is consistent with internalized moral values, and with some variant of shame/guilt/embarrassment if it is not morally consistent.

This sparking *naturally* occurs between feminine and masculine people in proximity who are getting to know one another. Dr. Arthur Aron, a psychology professor at Stony Brook University in Toronto, put men and women in a room and had them do tasks that involved revealing personal material and looking into each other's eyes. Everybody reported feeling more attracted sexually at the end of the experiment, and one of the couples eventually got married.

Nature vs. nurture sidebar.

In the seventies, it was popular in some academic circles to attribute the differences between men and women as primarily cultural. We've since discovered multiple influences on development and relationship—including hard-wired capacities that clearly arise from genetic predispositions. Masculine/feminine dynamics pulse through our DNA—driving us, influencing us, and determining how we relate. Aaron Sell at UCSB discovered that both men and women could accurately predict upper body strength and fighting ability in men—but not in women—by just hearing their voice. In an interview, Dr. Sell explained, “We're really not sure what detection mechanism in the brain provides the clues to such accurate vocal assessments. It's obviously something associated with the male voice across cultures and language groups, but has nothing to do with pitch, volume, amplitude, or talking speed.”

Determining a man's strength and fighting capacity from voice allows women to determine relative power and status, and both men and women to determine relative dangerousness. It's fascinating to fast forward to the present day and observe how male power and relative dangerousness have been included and transcended into female ravishment fantasies, and male dominance fantasies in our current cultures.

The question is never if erotic polarity *should* or *should not* happen, because it happens when masculine and feminine energies are in proximity. The question is what to do *when* it shows up. We'll explore masculine/feminine erotic polarity in much more detail in Chapter Three. Suffice to say for now that it naturally happens and can be used to enhance relationships or screw them up, depending on levels of awareness and resolve.

Awareness and resolve are particularly important in value systems—what we find beautiful, good, or true.

Our moral sense—the “Good” of Plato’s “beautiful, true, and good,” validity standards—is constantly operating and judging us and everybody else.

Our brains scan us and the world constantly, associating perceptions with previous experience, and anticipating what will happen. Our nervous systems automatically monitor us and the environment for what is safe/unsafe, what we want/don't want, what fits/doesn't fit our predictions, and what is right/wrong—our moral sense.

A moral sense—the moral line of development—begins being entrained into nervous systems at birth, and then accelerates at around one year old when infants can respond to disapproval from caregivers with shame emotions. These painful, “No!” “Don't do that,” “That's wrong,” “It's against the rules to...” experiences hard-wire our nervous systems—establish neural networks which deepen as they are progressively activated—into elaborate standards of right and wrong. When, at around two, we have self-awareness and can relate with ourselves, we scan ourselves and

feel shame emotions when violating internalized standards. At three I might feel guilty if I take a cookie from my brother, even if he doesn't protest or I don't get sanctioned by an adult. I have violated an internalized rule of not grabbing food from others.

The good news about progressing on the moral line of development is that our standards become refined and more caring as we mature. Moral sensitivities build on each other, including and transcending from the rule-based moral systems of elementary schoolers (who follow the rules because they are the rules), to the more principle-based systems of adulthood (where circumstances can effect what is right and wrong in different situations). We'll explore these dynamics in much more detail in Chapter Five.

So far, so good. We develop values, they become refined, more caring, and more principle based as we mature, and our moral systems develop along with our intellects, values, relational abilities, and a bunch of other developmental lines.

The problem is that our brains also scan for what we want and need. So... what if I spark an erotic polarity with a woman, and feel a need to *have her right now*? If I'm a woman, what if this guy I'm talking to is really attractive/nice/hot/interested/available and *wants me*, and I suddenly ache to surrender to "Yes!" If we're in a committed relationship, these impulses violate our values to be faithful...but *I want/need/must have her/him*.

Out of conflicts like these, our genius human consciousness begins to look for ways to meet our needs ("*I must have her!*") without violating our moral programming ("*It's wrong to cheat*")—in other words, we start looking for loopholes.

The theory of loopholes.

"Yes, cheating is bad, but what if...?"

We're going to spend all of Chapter Four on egocentric rationalizations for having affairs. Suffice to say, if we entertain *one exception* to the fidelity commitment, our unconscious will use all our intelligence overtime (waking and sleeping and I'm not

kidding about sleeping) to find a way through the loophole to justify cheating. It's like in Star Trek where containment fields encompass the warp drive's dilithium crystals. The energetic containment of the crystals needs to be *perfect* or the whole thing explodes into searing hot plasma.

Whatever your infidelity loophole is, "Wife's not into sex," "Husband's not into me," "She cheated on me when we were dating," "I'm going to leave when the kids go to college anyway," etc, your unconscious will work to use it to justify straying if you are erotically sparking with another person or fantasy.

We all have loopholes for moral values. "I don't drink more than a couple of glasses of wine... except at weddings and special occasions," or, "Sure, I'll eat the whole candy bar...because it's Halloween," or, "I'm faithful to my husband...but I can't help it, I just love to dance with other men at parties," illustrate how we talk ourselves into forbidden pleasures. Many of these are harmless, and even appropriate. If you don't have a weight problem, have a candy bar once in a while when you feel like it. If you're not an alcoholic, it won't kill you to have another beer at the Super Bowl party. The trick is to be aware of our loopholes and feel our egocentric, unconscious, impulse-driven self urging us towards transgressive action, *and then choose what serves the highest good*. Then we have the option—and responsibility—to say, "No thanks," if transgressing causes suffering or otherwise compromises someone's health and development.

Reason #26: Loopholes expand when indulged. The more a rationalization is practiced, the more credible it becomes. This is true for interpersonal rumors—the more people repeat them the more they believe them—and intrapersonal rationalizations.

Susan's loophole was that her husband David didn't understand her and she deserved to be understood. Her lover, Al, *really understood her*. He read the same books and magazines she did. He loved Billy Joel ("I love you just the way you are" was one of their favorites), and liked museums and art galleries. Al worked in her

office and knew the problems add agencies have to deal with. He noticed her outfits, moods, and complimented her often. Sexually, he took his time, adored her body, was delighted with her company, and patient with her multiple demands. All David cared about was snowboarding and his work (at which he was quite successful). David made fun of her artistic interests, embarrassed her with his jokes at parties (though their friends found him hilarious), and liked to spend the weekends smoking pot and watching football.

Now, fifteen years later, Susan and David are happy parents of two sons, with an expanding love between them. But it took years of heartache and pain. It would have been so much easier for everybody if Susan had come to me *before* she fell in love with Al, or at least *before* she began to have sex with him.

Reason #27: The deeper you go in an affair, the harder it is to dig out. The farther you progress on the attraction, flirtation, distracting attraction, sexual episode, secret relationship continuum, the harder it becomes to reconcile with your spouse, separate from your lover, and limit collateral damage.

In Susan's case, erotic polarity led to distracting attraction, led to loophole ("I deserve to be understood"), led to affair. But there are countless loopholes. Let's look at two others:

Harvey: "She/he doesn't know, so what's the harm?" loophole.

Harvey was a successful businessman who had built a comfortable living in Santa Barbara (not an easy task in an expensive town) being a rock solid consultant for local organizations and individuals. Tall and burly, he struggled with his weight, but daily exercise and organic food kept him in pretty good shape. His wife Jean was smart, a good mother, and sexually available, but fierce when challenged, and he had learned to avoid confrontations over their fourteen years of marriage.

Harvey had been born and raised in the city, and his businessmen friends thought nothing of going to strip bars and occasionally partying with prostitutes while at conferences and

business trips. Their collective loophole was, “We work hard, wives aren’t into sex, we deserve to party.” Harvey had the additional nuance of how lonely he got when away from Jean and the kids, but, as it turns out, after developing the habit of seeking sexual novelty from prostitutes, he couldn’t (didn’t want to) give it up when he stopped traveling so intensely. When he moved to Santa Barbara, he quickly figured out the local prostitution scene—“escort services”—and dialed it in whenever he felt the hunger for sexual adventure.

Inevitably, Jean caught Harvey in a series of lies leading to the discovery of one liaison with a prostitute, and he ended up in my office, facing possible divorce, Jean furious, and his life spiraling out of control. When I asked him how it all happened he responded with his loophole, “I didn’t think she’d ever find out, so what was the harm?”

Jerry: “I’m a sex addict,” loophole.

Jerry had always been great at getting women to have sex with him. High school, college, graduate school, he was voracious, confident and active. He had relationships, cruised (men and women), hired hookers, and pursued coworkers. The miracle when he came to me was that he hadn’t contracted AIDS or even pappilovirus or herpes—he had always been wise enough to practice safe sex, rare for someone so sexually compulsive.

By the time he called me, his wife was divorcing him, and Jerry had finally been challenged at work for creepy behavior. His managers demanded he get treatment.

“You sound like a sex addict to me.” I told him during our first session as I listened to his litany of compulsive sexual encounters. He smiled at me and said, “Well, I guess I can’t help myself then.”

This bravado soon shifted as we explored his life of loneliness, rage, and out of control behavior. He eventually entered a hospital treatment program, and, as far as I know, is currently happily married to his second wife. Jerry finally realized how his lies and

secrets had isolated him all his life, and had resolved to never lie or hide again.

Sex addiction is a terrifying thing, but it is still a choice to get help or practice the addiction. “I’m sick, so I can’t help myself,” is just another loophole.

Reason #28: Affairs potentiate addictions. *Indulged destructive behaviors increase in intensity, duration, and frequency while self-awareness and self-regulatory capabilities atrophy. If you have any capacity for addiction, allowing yourself to pursue forbidden pleasures can wire you into being an out-of-control addict with those pleasures. When you literally can’t say “no” to your substance, even when catastrophic results threaten, you become locked into nightmare enslavement to addictive demons. If you struggle to be free of the monkey on your back, one slip can plunge you back into compulsive acting out. In the movie, Shampoo, Warren Beatty played a promiscuous hairdresser who epitomized—and romanticized—sex addiction. Interestingly, at that time in his personal life, Beatty famously exhibited most of the characteristics of sex addiction—multiple partners, impulsive hook-ups, objectification of others as sexual objects, etc.*

Pissed, dissed, blissed, and blessed.

Bill O'Hanlon says we find purpose in what makes us mad (pissed), where people have challenged us (dissed), where we find pleasure (blissed), and where someone has honorably initiated us (blessed). All these states can also generate loophole to affairs:

Pissed.

My wife doesn't care about our romantic life. All she cares about is herself, or the children, or her job, or something. My husband doesn't seem interested, gets mad too much, drinks/smokes pot/plays/works too much. We can't talk. We always argue. He/she puts me down in front of my friends.

Dissed.

When couples are angry, they say stupid things. Sometimes a husband will angrily announce, “I don’t care, do whatever you want,” or a wife will say, “Go ahead. People don’t change, and I can’t change you.”

I tell them. “Don’t say that. I’ve known way too many couples where the dissed partner goes out and falls in love with someone else—sometimes that very day.”

Blissed.

The romantic infatuation slide gets slippier and steeper the longer you let yourself ride. Wait long enough, and your dopamine/norepinephrine elevations leave you intoxicated by—obsessed with—your lover. Separation at the wrong moment—for instance when you’ve been caught rather than when you have conflicts with your lover—can be agonizing.

Blessed.

Male admiration of sexual adventures can create cultures—like guys who go to strip clubs together—that bless sexual transgressions. To women, the romantic allure of being the secret lover, having the secret lover, and playing with “true love,” while married can feel like being the special heroine in a romance. All these loopholes seem like magic blessings, but usually become appalling curses.

Full resolve closes loopholes, defensive states seek loopholes.

There are countless books, programs, and teachers that can guide us to expanding marital bliss. John Gottman’s *The Seven Principles of a Happy Marriage*, David Schnarch’s *Passionate Marriage*, my own *The Attuned Family*, and hosts of other systems, *if followed*, result in blissful marriages. Why doesn’t everyone use these systems to have wonderful fulfilling relationships? What’s the problem?

The problem we *instinctively* avoid painful emotions like fear, anger, sadness, and especially shame emotions including guilt,

embarrassment, mortification, and chagrin. Our nervous systems *naturally* develop avoidance habits, and by the time we're conscious enough to examine them, these habits are anchored in neural circuits of our brains and bodies that constellate *defensive states* when we feel threatened.

We tend to enter defensive states when feeling threatened, and these states distort perception, judgment, emotion, and actions.

Michelle and Gabe.

Michelle is married to Gabe and shops at Trader Joe's each week. As she stands in the checkout one day, this cute guy flirts with her and she flirts back, even going so far as telling him her name, smiling coyly, and letting him know, "I shop here every Friday morning." As she walks out she feels uncomfortable, almost realizing she went too far, but—instead of feeling the shame emotion and considering what this episode might mean about her life and marriage—she tells herself, "Nothing happened, so what's the harm? Gabe's too critical to understand; he'll just get mad if tell him."

Michelle conveniently forgets the whole encounter until next Friday when she find herself eagerly looking for Mr. Attractive as she enter the store, wearing a particularly revealing top.

In this example, the threat of feeling disapproval/shame at what she'd just done cued a defensive state where Michelle disconnected—dissociated—from her feelings and thoughts, and made a series of dumb choices. What defensive states have in common are amplified or numbed emotions (Michelle blanked out her shame/guilt at going too far with Mr. Attractive), distorted perspectives (believing there was no harm in the episode), destructive impulses (to not talk about the situation with Gabe and wear a sexy top next Friday), and diminished capacities for empathy and self-reflection. She doesn't consider how her flirtation might hurt Gabe, Mr. Attractive, or her. She's resisting awareness of dangerously encouraging a distracting attraction. She's playing with secret sexual liaisons—which can injure even if

they don't involve active sex—and risking further embarrassment and damage.

Reason #29: We can lose favorite places, activities, friends, and outfits because of affairs. *Most affairs happen where we live or work. Once transgressive lines have been crossed, it's hard to reestablish comfort and safety. Many couples lose favorite restaurants, vacations, friends, garments, and hangouts associated by one partner or the other with sexual transgressions.*

One central way defensive states manifest is in *lack of resolve* to fully love—meaning to fully commit to what serves the highest good in your marriage. We'll explore why all humans develop defensive habits like these in Chapter Five. In the meantime, the simple answer to dealing with defensive states is *fully resolving* to love in each moment. This helps us discern defensive states and healthy states instead of indulging destructive impulses. In healthy states we can reevaluate amplified or numbed emotions, critically examine distorted perspectives, resist destructive impulses, and direct ourselves toward compassionate understanding of others and ourselves—empathy and self-reflection.

If Michelle and Gabe are fully resolved to love, and deep enough to look inward for love in distress, she might go home and say:

Michelle: “I flirted too far with a guy at Trader Joe’s today. I’m sorry. I was thinking about it, and I’ve haven’t felt sexy around you as much as I’d like recently.”

Gabe: He’s distressed, but concerned. He consciously soothes his distress and focuses on concern. “I’m sorry you haven’t felt sexy. How can I help? You know I think you’re delectable.”

Michelle: She feels a wave of affection for Gabe being so accepting and warm. “You’re so nice.” Gabe smiles and kisses her.

This couple is deep on relationship and self-awareness lines of development. In an exquisite intersubjective dance they have efficiently turned a potential wound into deeper love and consciousness. We can all do this, if we *fully resolve* to serve the highest good.

Anything less than full resolve creates *loopholes*, and we know what our brain does with loopholes—it uses our human genius to help us find a way through to what we want.

Zero tolerance for loopholes.

We'll explore deeper into the land of loopholes in Chapter Four. The key point in the theory of loopholes is that if you have *one crack* in your moral structure of fidelity, you are vulnerable under the right circumstances to cheat. Once cheating starts to accelerate from fantasy to flirtation to affiliation, it requires progressively more time, energy, money, and risk to deal with the fallout.

Alternately, what if someone catches a loophole early and adjusts to love and the highest good—often by seeking help from intimates? This usually leads to deeper love, more trust, and mature wisdom.

Many people have come into treatment with me struggling with a loophole, but not surrendering to it. Michelle told Gabe about the episode and they fought, and—wisely—scheduled an appointment. I told Michelle, “It’s wonderful you had the courage to talk about this.” Gabe was hurt and angry—in his own defensive states—and kept attacking Michelle as the story unfolded. I interrupting him again and again, finally saying, “It was an act of love for Michelle to tell you and be willing to deal with the embarrassment and humiliation of dealing with this. She’s saved both of you an incredible amount of suffering by discussing this before letting herself go any further. You need to give her a break and focus on how she’s open to loving *you* better.”

Luck and full resolve.

When I was in my teens and twenties, a common question after a party or a date was, “Did you get lucky?” meaning, “Did you have sex?” I thought at the time it was just guys who did this, but have since found plenty of women who share the value and ask the question. In retrospect, this reflects past and current cultural standards. Finding someone attractive and having sex is considered lucky. Ask your college student friends and your grown children. If

they trust you enough to be honest, they resonate at least somewhat with “Did you get lucky?”

This standard—like most cultural standards—gets inculcated into our nervous systems through enculturation and doesn’t magically disappear when we get married or make monogamous commitments. In the presence of attractive others, some parts of us want to get lucky. So, what *about* getting lucky?

Richard Wiseman: Dr. Lucky.

Richard Wiseman is an English psychologist who studied luck, determined what makes people lucky, and developed a training program to help people become luckier. I particularly like that he’s a psychologist with a sense of humor. I know this because he did a research project testing how 350,000 participants reacted to 40,000 jokes.

Joke sidebar: *Dr. Wiseman determined from his research that the funniest joke in the world is the following: Two hunters are out in the woods. One has a heart attack and drops to the forest floor. The other hunter frantically calls 911, “It looks like my friend has dropped dead from a heart attack. What should I do?” The dispatcher coolly responds, “Calm down sir. First make sure he’s dead.” After a few seconds the sound of a gunshot rings over the line, and the man says, “Alright, I’m sure he’s dead. Now what?”*

In his book, *The Luck Factor*, Dr. Wiseman describes how lucky people change routines and are open to opportunities, listen to and act on intuitive impulses, expect good things to happen, and have an instinct for taking bad things and turning them into good things (lemons into lemonade). Unlucky people don’t exhibit these characteristics.

As you can see, all these qualities can be cultivated. We all can—and should—learn and practice being lucky. After all, lucky people are happier, more positive, and get more of what they want.

But, what about, “Did you get lucky?”

If your purpose is having casual sex, being open to opportunities and changing routines, expecting good things to happen, listening to your intuition, and changing negative situations into positive ones will get you laid—I guarantee it. The fly in this particular luck ointment is having a distorted sense of what exactly a happy fulfilling life is.

If you happen to be someone who's kept the post-adolescent value of "getting lucky" with transgressive sex, you will be open to opportunities for transgressive sex, expect it to happen, use your considerable intuitive powers to create opportunities, and work creatively with attractive others to get it on.

To have a good, lucky marriage, you need to believe in joyful, passionate monogamy. If you don't believe in joyful monogamy, how can you practice expecting positive romantic things to happen in your marriage? How can you believe opportunities for hot marital love regularly show up? How can you turn sour marital lemons into sweet, sexy marital lemonade if you don't believe sweet, sexy marital lemonade exists?

Believing in joyful monogamy is just part of the lucky marriage equation. Also important is full resolve to not screw up joyful monogamy with transgressive sex. Zero tolerance for infidelity loopholes protects us from the siren call of our defenses when they start directing us to deal with yearning and stress by cheating or—even worse—start harnessing our capacities to enhance luck by making us "lucky" at cheating.

So, to have a happy, lucky marriage, believe a growing hot monogamy is possible for you and your spouse, expect your love to grow, change routines and be alert for opportunities for pleasurable intimacy of all kinds with your spouse, and—when the inevitable problems of marriage crop up—turn them into deeper intimacy, more passion, and deeper commitment.

Defensive states will show up to challenge "lucky marriage" beliefs and practices, but we can grow wiser and stronger from

catching defensive states and regulating them into states of healthy response (lemons into lemonade).

Reason #30: Affairs mess up our luck. “Lucky” in affairs equals “unlucky” in marriage, family, and work. To harness luck and keep getting luckier, our values have to be congruent enough so that getting lucky in one area enhances other areas rather than compromises them. A “lucky” wife has a husband devoted to her who trusts her to love him well. A “lucky” husband has a radiant feminine wife who supports his mission and general happiness. Both cultivate “luck” in their erotic/romantic relationship by expecting fun, being alert for romantic/erotic opportunities, attending to intuitive flashes on how to enjoy romance/sex more, and resolving conflict into more intimacy and fun.

Yes, it is fiendishly hard to consistently be aware of defensive states.

Mostly I love self-help books—I’ve written a few of my own including *The Attuned Family, Sessions,* and *The Gift of Shame.* One of my problems with many of the self-help approaches is that they ignore or underestimate the universality and power of defensive habits. They tend to minimize the consistent—and often irritating and confusing—effort required to discern defensive states, resist tempting loopholes, and courageously reach for the highest good.

It is absolutely worth the effort to address defensive states and close loopholes, but the work is frequently bewildering and frustrating. What makes it particularly difficult in the arena of secret affairs is our human drive for, and fascination with, erotic polarity.

CHAPTER THREE: EROTIC POLARITY: A TWO-EDGED SWORD.

Masculine practice of being consciousness.

Feminine practice being love through the body.

Masculine presence—complete acceptance

of gain and loss and love and death.

Feminine radiance is woman's gift,

lovelight flowing from her heart and body.

Jill.

Jill came into my office the embodiment of a twenty-first century professional woman. She had on a business suit with conservative silver earrings and a matching necklace, minimal makeup, and talked with the kind of practical competence I've come to associate with gifted women managers.

Keith: "What brings you in today?"

Jill: With a sad, concerned expression, "My boss, Ian, and I are in love. He says he loves me and he's unhappy with his wife. He keeps telling me he's going to leave her, but he never does, and life is passing me by."

Keith: I need to assess the depth of involvement and the damage already done. "How long have you been involved?"

Jill: "What do you mean?" To a guy, the above question usually means, "When did you start having sex?" To a woman, it often means, "When did you realize you were in love?" To me, it means, "When were you first aware that you'd talked yourself through a loophole?"

Keith: "How long have you had a private, secret relationship?"

Jill: Not realizing she's avoiding the question, she shifts to her loopholes. "We started having working lunches during important cases. We enjoy each other's company so much. His wife is always criticizing him and making demands, and the poor guy works so hard. I know, I'm there helping him. Eventually, it felt natural to kind of fall into each other's arms."

Keith: Length of the affair tends to be important. Briefer is generally better, because the lovers haven't habituated themselves to double lives necessitating habitual lying and pretending. Six months or more of being secretly involved usually means normalized lifestyles of cheating. I need more information. "And this was a year ago? Six months? Two years?"

Jill: Women remember significant dates much more than men. "Valentine's day of 2005 [eighteen months previously], he told me he couldn't help himself, he loved me."

David Deida suggests a typical man's life involves success... failure... success... failure... success... death. A typical woman's life involves love's happening... love's not happening... love's happening... love's not happening... love's happening... death.

The first, "I love you," in an affair tends to be a critical point for women because love is happening, while the first sex tends to be a critical point for men as successful consummation of urgent desire.

This does not make all women hopeless romantics, and all men horny dogs. It just reflects the fact that men and women live in different realms. We tend to imagine our lover thinks as we do, often with disastrous results.

Reason #31: If you're a guy, you will ultimately feel like a failure in a secret affair—guaranteed. You'll get caught, your lover will go crazy, you or your wife will go crazy, you'll lose your job—you will feel like a loser about something.

Reason #32: If you're a woman, your affair ultimate transforms into love betrayed, disappointed, or lost. Juliet died with Romeo. Monica wasn't ultimately chosen by Bill, and Hillary suffered world-wide humiliation. You have a chance of happy outcomes if you insist your lover relationships at least have the potential to grow in healthy ways—a good guiding principle is to fall in love in ways that can lead to beautiful outcomes.

Masculine and Feminine are different types of people.

Do you like to watch sports, and especially enjoy the rough and tumble of football, playoff basketball, and even Ultimate Fighting? Do movies where the hero has to save the world, exists on the edge of death, and maintains a focused presence in the face of extreme hazards draw your attention? Do you have your work clothes, play clothes, and dirty-job clothes that don't change much over the

years? When you're real angry, do you find yourself wanting to be alone for a while? Are you drawn to feminine light in the form of beautiful smiling women, the female shape in sensuous motion, or a few bare inches of a woman's breast or thigh? Are you a guy?

Do you enjoy romance novels and books like *Eat, Pray, Love*? Do you like shopping for clothes, and choosing jewelry and shoes to match your outfit? Do you especially enjoy family being together with cousins, uncles, aunts, grandparents, and kids? When you're angry or stressed, do you seek out the company of sympathetic others, especially women? Does a calm, focused man who stands present in the face of adversity with a touch of humor attract you? Does it fluster you a little if he turns his attention on *you*, and somehow delivers the message that he wants *you*? Is it a bit of a thrill to feel beautiful and sexy? Are you a woman?

Men and women love differently and live in different universes.

If a happy life and thriving marriage is supported by courageously examining all of who we are, accepting ourselves, and growing with our spouse towards greater bliss, what are the keys to success? How can we best understand ourselves and love each other? I believe people in most successful marriages realize men and women love differently and inhabit in different universes. Happy partners learn to understand and integrate their different worldviews rather than futilely keep trying to coerce one another to see the world differently.

David Deida's understanding of masculine and feminine is my favorite overview of erotic polarity. Deida teaches we all have a masculine aspect identifying with pure consciousness—the absolute, unchanging witness, and a feminine aspect identifying with all that moves and changes. Everybody has different combinations of masculine and feminine in different states and in different relationships.

In our sexual relationships, most people have either a deeper masculine or a deeper feminine essence, which determines whether we are more delighted with being the follower in the sexual dance

(the feminine) or the leader in the sexual dance (the masculine). Remember the Meredith Chivers' study where men and women looked at pornographic videos? The men watched the women. Naked women—especially having sex—draw masculine attention. The women watched the women and the men's eyes looking hungrily at the women. The masculine wants to possess. The feminine wants to feel herself the embodied sex-Goddess, seen as erotic light, known, and claimed by a trustable, present masculine partner. The sexual surrender of a woman to a man has special significance to him—“*I have possessed her. She has erotically surrendered to me.*” “I love you's,” have special significance to a woman—“*He knows me and has claimed me. I have surrendered blissfully to him.*”

Reason #33: Affairs diminish your manhood. *Erotic polarity is diluted for a man compromising core values—you ultimately can't embody a trustable, present masculine presence serving the highest good while cheating.*

Reason #34: Affairs diminish your womanhood. *Erotic polarity is diluted for a woman when people suffer as a result of her selfish actions—you ultimately can't embody the erotically radiant Goddess while savaging marriages and families.*

Erotic polarity is the spark between masculine and feminine optimized by compassionate awareness and full resolve.

You walk into a party in your slinky red dress, and see your friend Sally with her new boyfriend, Sam. As she introduces you, Sam looks into your eyes with interest and says, “Sally's told me how wonderful you are. Lovely dress, by the way.” You find yourself smiling and blushing slightly. You and Sam have just constellated an erotic polarity.

This polarity is purely energetic—it is innocent. You didn't decide to do it (though you like how you look in your slinky red dress), and neither did Sam (though it was fun for him to see you blush at his appreciative attention). We usually discover erotic

sparks as they're happening, and deal with them however we've learned to in such moments.

At any given time, someone in a more masculine state will tend to polarize with another in a more feminine state, and there will be energetic connections—often erotic polarities—which either person can consciously feel and regulate *if they've learned how*.

Neurobiological research tells us that simply being aware of feelings helps us modulate them, but simple awareness is often not enough to deal with the power of sexual polarity. We also need to know what our values are in these moments and be *fully resolved* to support those values.

Would children benefit from learning age-appropriate versions of these principles and practices? What do you think?

Western society tends to teach boys and especially girls to *not feel* erotic polarities. Children announcing sexual feelings are at best subtly discouraged from continuing their explorations, and at worse publicly humiliated for violating sexual norms, which include, “You can't be sexual, feel sexual, appear sexual, or enjoy sexuality until you're grown up.” We essentially teach our children to dissociate—disconnect—from their sexual aspects, essences, and experiences, and then attack them when sexuality eventually shows up unexpectedly in their lives. How can we process sexual feelings and urges—and appropriately regulate them—if we know little about them and have learned to avoid feeling them?

Worse, well-meaning parents indoctrinate girls with, “If you don't feel like it, the answer is always 'No!'", and their boys with, “It is shameful to question or explore a girl's 'no!'” These are fine standards for initial child and adolescent sexual exploration and discovery, but become a liability in the intimate bonding stage of relationships when romantic infatuation has passed, and it requires *conscious effort* to continue and deepen a couple's erotic connection.

Remember the women diagnosed with “hypoactive arousal disorder” because they didn't feel desire enough to be motivated to

have sex? The authors of the study estimated up to 30% of adult women meet the criteria for hypoactive arousal disorder. When you start getting figures like 30%, you're usually not dealing with normal developmental problems; you're dealing with cultural problems—problems involving societal distortions and demands.

Biology research tells us that *in romantic infatuation*, desire leads to arousal, and this validates what has been established as the American social and psychological norm. *In intimate bonding*, new research tells us that—often—*arousal leads to desire*.

Happy long term couples are not as biochemically driven to intimacy, touch, and love-making as romantically infatuated lovers, but they know the good which comes from intimacy, touch, and love making, and insist on this nourishment regularly.

Without knowledge of the dynamics of sexual polarity through life stages, many couples are left literally fumbling around in the dark, and often give up on their sexual relationship almost entirely, leaving both partners vulnerable to distracting attractions, romantic infatuations, and affairs with other men and women.

Such affairs and infatuations are often less intimate than marriage in many ways since the principals have shared less, gone through fewer life passages together, and have less commitment. On the other hand, this lack of intimate experience paradoxically supports erotic polarity, into romantic infatuation, into secret affairs, into relational train wrecks—*all driven by lack of knowledge, compromised self-awareness, and uncertain resolve*.

Reason #35: Joyful monogamy creates the best, most enduring sexual fulfillment. *Many happily married couples in their fifties and sixties report having the best sex of their lives. How can this be, given menopause, diminished testosterone, the ravages of aging, and the demands of life? An intimate romantic/sexual connection consciously supported over many years can take you to places impossible with someone you barely know. Even better, happily married couples having great sex inspire everyone and hurt no one. Affairs give you immediate passion that can extend*

months—rarely years—but finally crashes and explodes, injuring you and others. Deepening eroticism with bonded couples—who understand principles like arousal leading to desire—requires more conscious effort, but can deliver lifelong expanding passion.

Polarity into enjoyable attractions, distracting attractions, romantic infatuations, and intimate bonding.

Our brains constantly scan the environment, taking in thousands of inputs, and associating and anticipating based on what we need, want, and perceive as safe or unsafe. When something stands out, seems to answer a need, or *feels unsafe*, our brains constellate seven plus-or-minus two aspects to focus on, automatically creating a story about what is happening.

“Unsafe,” has special precedence because “safe/unsafe” is more central to immediate survival than what we need or want. I’m hungry and walking down State Street past The Natural Café and smell chicken grilling. I glance at the front of the Café, remember the last time I enjoyed grilled chicken, and think I just have time to get a grilled chicken salad. While I’m outside eating my salad, I hear brakes squealing nearby, and stand up in alarm, ready to move quickly. My brain read the environment as unsafe, trumped my hunger, and got me ready to deal with an immediate threat.

What about polarity? After survival of *me*, survival of the species is programmed into every fiber of our bodies. I observe the feminine shape, and dopamine (the pleasure neurotransmitter) is released in certain areas of my brain, my attention is drawn to her, and the story becomes some version of, “I want her now. How can I have her?” Men ogling women is a form of possessing them which is generally acceptable in Western society (apparently, it’s also OK to pinch in Italy). Much feminine clothing, makeup, and accessories are designed to support this process. Makeup enhances lips, cheeks, and eyes, facial areas that attract eye contact. Earrings, necklaces, and rings bring men’s attention to revealing displays of feminine flesh. Clothes enhance the hourglass figure, subtly shaping breasts and legs to suggest a naked feminine form,

or are designed to hide features a woman believes might be unattractive. Health, youth, and fecundity magnetize masculine sexual interest.

When a woman feels beautiful, or receives *welcome* attention from an attractive guy, dopamine is released in her brain, and the pleasure is transmitted into movement, breath, and sound that indicate sexual interest. Men who seem high status, dynamic, unafraid, and present, rate higher on women's attraction meters. In addition, men who are taller, have rougher features (indicating higher testosterone levels), and whose smell subtly conveys the fact that their immune systems are different from the woman's rate as more attractive in many studies—especially when a woman is in the most fertile days of her cycle.

Men and women feeling erotic polarity will become curious about each other and more eager to share personal information. Men will want to convey their success and status, women their sensitivity, caring, and sexuality.

Such polarities happen frequently, and I call them *enjoyable attractions*. They often enliven both participants and are part of the pleasure of dinner parties, concerts, dance clubs, and social occasions. These enjoyable attractions are intersubjective energetic polarities that are being monitored and regulated by both parties. If *either* person sets firm boundaries on serve-the-highest-good levels, the polarity will cause little harm.

If both people are available (not in lover relationships with others) and discerning, inclusive boundaries of approaching and cultivating a potential mate can lead to hot, satisfying hookups. If one partner goes crazy—or is otherwise not available or appropriate as a lover—firm boundaries can minimize harm.

When a married person begins to push farther on make-me-feel-good-right-now-and-damn-the-consequences levels, tensions arise pushing for deepening intimacy—which can attract or threaten. If you're a guy, what if a sexually radiant goddess at a party comes on heavily to you while one of you is wearing a

wedding ring? If you're a woman, what if a present, attractive, safe man looks deeply into your eyes with understanding, humor, and desire? Recklessly surrendering to such moments plunges people into distracting attractions, infatuations, and erotic involvements, and the farther and faster a love affair accelerates, the harder it is to interrupt.

If you and I have erotic polarity and you intensify your feminine radiance *at me*, yearning to be known and claimed *by me*, I'll either surrender to deepening the polarity—following the seductive call of the affair—or I'll firm up boundaries, serving the highest good by not allowing our polarity to deepen. Given that we get more reckless and impulsive when sexually aroused, I encourage married people to be a little suspicious of their judgment when wanting to push sexual boundaries.

If I amplify my masculine presence and hunger *at you*, wanting to know and claim *you*, while you light up *at me*, genetic imperatives drive both of our brains to rationalize creating babies. Our attention is drawn to one another's attractive features, we feel pleasurable emotions thinking about, seeing, smelling, or touching each other, and we generate lots of kind and complimentary thoughts ("Keith seems like a nice guy. He's interested in me." "She's hot. She's into me."). Soon this becomes a **distracting attraction**, where we suffer if we can't become more intimate.

Distracting attractions are just that, distracting. While an enjoyable attraction tends to leave us grateful for the experience, a distracting attraction leaves us frustrated we can't have more. We easily let go of enjoyable distractions, but we obsess about and suffer from distracting attractions. The neural circuitry of distracting attraction is dopamine driven and activates the same areas of the brainstem that drug addiction, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and compulsive gambling activate (the ventral tegmental area and the caudate nucleus especially). Further, oxytocin in women and vasopressin in men—female and male bonding hormones respectively—start peaking during distracting attractions.

Reason #36: With compassionate and wise boundaries, erotic polarity can improve social relationships. Shared recognition and appreciation—even sexual attraction—can enhance relationships and support intimacy, creativity, and community, ***if handled with integrity and clear resolve.*** Seeing and enjoying the sex-goddess in feminine people helps enliven them and supports shared activities—as long as it doesn't get creepy. A woman radiating sexual light enlivens masculine people and adds energy to shared activities—as long as it doesn't get creepy. “Creepy” is when someone starts surrendering to a loophole—promoting transgressive sexual involvement.

When distracting attractions are indulged by both parties—regular contact and mutual stroking with intimate touch, tones, expressions, gestures, and personal sharing—they tend to turn into romantic infatuations where people become literally addicted to each other for days, weeks, or months. This is the “being in love,” feeling that we all enjoy so much, a biochemical joyride which numbs our abilities to discern flaws in our lover, blocks out other demands, and causes us to keep wanting more and more of the other in as many ways as possible. When sex starts, we want lots of it, and keep wanting lots until—paradoxically—we get so intimate knowing/being known that our nervous systems start relating to the other as being “family,” and our brains activate ***intimate bonding*** systems driven more by oxytocin and vasopressin and less by dopamine. Now we are not so urgent, not so sexual, and can see flaws and respond to them as we did to similar cues in our families of origin.

Intimate bonding can sustain hot eroticism, but less because we are addicted to each other and more because we choose eroticism to support love. This is where knowledge and training become crucial. In the absence of knowing what's going on, we're likely to tell ourselves stories like, “We fell out of love,” or, “I was blinded by love, and maybe you're not the right person for me,” or, “You don't love me anymore.”

It is so alarming to go from having romantic infatuation to not having it—to suspect you’ve lost that loving feeling—that it demands a reaction of some sort. You *can* address the issue with your partner to consciously enhance intimacy, connection, and eroticism—usually the superior approach. More painful and less healthy reactions are to dissociate and tell yourself stories about how this is how all marriages go—hot in the beginning and then cooling off, or you can look for loopholes to feel hot again with someone else.

Hot monogamy.

David Schnarch’s book, *Passionate Marriage*, makes the point that committed couples can and should add heat to their eroticism by deepening their individual responsibility, self-regulating hurt feelings and destructive impulses, and committing to grow individually and together. Like many writers and clinicians, he emphasizes facing and working through painful conflicts as necessary components to successful marriage. As he says in his book, *Passionate Marriage*, “...don’t bother looking for sanctuary in your marriage. Seeking protection from its pains and pleasures misses its purpose: *marriage prepares us to live and love on life’s terms* (Italics are his).”

In other words, hot monogamy is not so much a function of lack of conflict, but of respectful initiation and successful negotiation of conflict into loving engagement. John Gottman in *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* makes the same point. He observes that healthy couples have conflicts characterized by caring initiation and effective repair.

Hot monogamy is definitely possible. Helen Fisher put long term, self-described “still in love” couples in an fMRI brain scanner and—sure enough—the same areas that lit up in new lovers lit up in them. The difference was that they also had emotional regulatory circuits activated helping them calm and relax. The take home message from all this research is that satisfying romance and eroticism is available for long term couples

if they are willing to grow to meet the challenges of deepening intimacy.

How?

How do we do this? How do we cocreate caring initiation and quick repair of conflict? How do we work at consciously deepening erotic polarity as romantic infatuation fades and the demands of life intrude?

Surprisingly, the first answer is simply learning the rhythms, demands, and stages of increasing intimacy and committing to growing love and eroticism at each stage. Just this understanding takes huge pressures off us to have effortless hot intimacy indefinitely, and to have all the answers right now. We never have all the answers right now because we'll change and hopefully grow in the months and years to come, and that growth will empower us to ask more questions, receive more answers, and cultivate new perspectives. We grow through stages, and happy couples tend to support each other's growth.

More specifically, we can dedicate a certain part of our marriage to deepening intimacy and erotic polarity, and keep true to the practices we generate through the distractions of development, career, children and age.

Reason #37: Joyful monogamy helps us age well. Someday—if we're lucky—we'll be old. Which skills are going to serve us best when this happens? Will our capacities to cheat and lie help us have great relationships and great sex through our fifties, sixties, seventies, and eighties? I don't think so. Will the skills generated by a lifetime of development, conscious intimacy/eroticism, and increasing self-knowledge and compassion with a willing and able partner predispose us to a happy life? Of course they will. The time to start practicing joyful, passionate monogamy is now.

Erotic polarity is the energetic play of masculine and feminine. Let's enjoy it.

The verse at the beginning of this chapter comes from a song I wrote to help keep me oriented to central aspects of masculine and feminine practice (I used to have a rock-n-roll band called *Blown Head Gasket*). Let's look at it again:

Masculine practice of being consciousness.

Feminine practice being love through the body.

Masculine presence—complete acceptance

Of gain and loss and love and death.

Feminine radiance is woman's gift,

Love light flowing from her heart and body.

The masculine pole of an erotic polarity anchors himself in deepest understanding of what best serves this particular moment, or—as David Deida puts it—what most opens this moment. Such deep understanding leads to “being consciousness,” and requires simultaneous attention to what is optimal while completely accepting whatever gifts and challenges the universe provides.

The feminine pole of an erotic polarity expresses love through her body, opening the moment with fresh, current emotion and joyful emersion in the sensual richness of now—activities which tend to magnetize the masculine.

Most erotically fulfilled couples find daily expressions of the above, and practice them religiously—meaning there is a sacred quality to their commitments to authentic expression and mutual nourishment.

CHAPTER FOUR: LOOPHOLES AND SHADOWS.

Secret affairs cause all kinds of damage, sometimes affecting people in surprising ways. Partners experience sexual betrayal differently, depending on countless variables. When beginning therapy with someone having a secret affair, I find certain questions revealing and useful:

- How committed are you to change to improve your marriage?
- How resilient and emotionally self-regulating are you in general, and around this transgression in particular?
- How profound and extended is the secret affair?
- Do you or your lover have children?
- Is drug/alcohol abuse/dependence present?

To get a sense of degree of relative destruction from affairs, check out the following two continua. On the far left side are relatively healthy people who generally value marriage, and might allow erotic polarity to accelerate into distracting attractions—causing some suffering—but probably not into transgressive sexual relationships. On the far right side are callous, self-indulgent individuals who willfully engage in sexual betrayal and enjoy the ensuing suffering and drama.

Sexual betrayal destructiveness continua.

Mild sexual acting out-----
major sadistic betrayal

Mildly confused or unresolved-----
blinding, violent defenses

Reason #38: Betrayal amplifies betrayal. *Each time you hook up with your secret lover, lie to your spouse, or resist awareness of the damage your affair is causing, you move incrementally to the right on the sexual-betrayal-destructiveness-continua.*

If you happen to be someone on the far right side of these continua, congratulations! You are one of the few who would read this far in a book challenging your worldview and are willing to at least consider changing your sick habits. I suggest you get into therapy and be prepared to accept you are self-destructive—probably somewhat sadistic in enjoying other’s pain—and get off on the power, drama, dark pleasures, and suffering of sexual betrayal. Believe me, if you commit to love and positive change you can feel whole, empowered, and passionately satisfied in a healthy relationship, but it will take lots of self-examination and

courageous action. If you're married, it might be too late for you to save your relationship—you might have emotionally separated past a point of no return, or your spouse might feel too wounded, distressed, or distrustful by this time to do the necessary work—but it is possible that you both are able and willing to make the journey to healthy relational bliss.

If your marriage is not salvageable, *you are*. You can grow, develop, deepen, and learn how to care better for yourself and others. Get help from the multiple resources available in this culture. Decide to be a better, more loving, honorable man or woman, and commit to daily improvement.

If you are like most of the rest of us, you are toward the left side of the continua. You may have had distracting attractions, romantic infatuations, sexual secrets, or even a secret affair—like Susan from our last chapter—and want to stop the madness and have satisfying love, preferably with your spouse. Alternately, maybe you really want to leave your marriage and don't know how. Either way, I'll bet you don't want to hurt people, you feel bad about the pain you've already caused, and are somewhat willing to self-examine and change in service of love and health.

Wherever you are on the continua, an important first step in untangling the mess is to critically consider your personal rationalizations—loopholes—for allowing yourself to cheat. These loopholes *always* involve blind spots—areas of yourself you have trouble perceiving. In Jungian psychology such Blindspots are known as “shadow,” because they drift in the darkness beyond full conscious awareness, just outside our reach, and we subtly, habitually avoid awareness of them.

Avoiding awareness is a huge big deal because we develop by *knowing, accepting, and protecting* different parts of ourselves, and we can't know and accept—much less protect—what we literally can't perceive. We'll explore why and how we develop blind spots in Chapter Five. Right now let's examine how knowing, accepting, and protecting different parts of ourselves automatically leads to personal growth and better relationships.

Reason #39: Enacting bad habits blinds us to bad habits. Nobody wants to grow more blind and clueless, but that's exactly what usually happens in secret affairs, we become less able to perceive craziness.

Knowing, accepting, and protecting our different selves leads to deepening interior and interpersonal intimacy: humans as complex systems.

Complex systems are hierarchical groups of differentiated parts that are connected, open to outside influence, and capable of

chaotic behavior. Examples of complex systems are earth's ecosystems, communities of people, relationships, and human brains. All these examples involve groups—in the human brain the *one hundred billion* neurons we each possess—that are connected, organized hierarchically, and absolutely capable of chaotic behavior. An awesomely cool characteristic of complex systems is that they have a *natural self-organizing tendency toward greater complexity*.

Greater complexity shows up subjectively as greater simplicity and energy efficiency. My favorite example is how a modern computer is simpler to understand and operate than the original computers constructed in the 50's and 60's, and uses vastly less energy. You have more computing power in your cell phone than scientists did in the computers they used to guide intercontinental missiles in the 60's. Greater complexity in individual humans shows up as deeper consciousness and greater compassion—think the Dalai Lama—which is why people are sometimes better grandparents than they were parents. They're deeper and wiser because their nervous systems and relationships have integrated toward greater complexity. Greater complexity in relationships shows up as deeper understanding, more self-awareness, greater appreciation for others, quicker repair of injuries, and standards of behavior that reach for the highest good—in other words, superior marriages and satisfying intimate relationships.

OK, this is all wonderful, but how do we apply it? How do we promote integration within ourselves and in our relationships? The key to promoting integration is the “connected,” in “hierarchical groups of differentiated parts that are *connected*, open to outside influence, and capable of chaotic behavior.” We connect with interior parts of ourselves by *perceiving and accepting them*. We connect with different aspects of others by *knowing and accepting them*.

Reason #40: Affairs always separate in unhealthy ways. Affairs separate spouses from each other, parents from children, lovers from social networks, cheaters from their own values. This is

unhealthy separation. Clean separation is divorce before betrayal, and compassionate boundary setting (like asking your husband to leave the house until he completely ends it with his lover) before passive aggressive acting out. Contaminated separation blocks integration and personal evolution. Clean separation paradoxically supports growth and intimacy.

We can't truly know and accept unless we also protect.

Central to “accepting” is taking a stand against violence. We can't truly accept a part of us that does violence without *protecting* that part from doing harm. I can't fully accept my destructive angry side unless I don't allow that side to hurt people unnecessarily—which *protects* my angry self from doing harm.

In their hearts, mature people rarely prefer violence. Violent impulses mask deeper needs and yearnings. Impulses to attack are usually based in yearning for justice to be served and to be understood and accepted. An alcoholic's craving to drink—which does physical, psychological, financial, and relational damage—is based on desperate, conflicted, flailing efforts to avoid pain and create love. To get to the authentic needs beneath our violence, we need *internal boundaries* that refuse to indulge destructive impulses as soon *as we perceive them*. An internal boundary for the impulse to drink alcoholically is, “I'm not going to drink and I am going to contact someone right now for help.” An internal boundary for the impulse to be mean is, “I'm going to take a deep breath, feel my urge to say hurtful things in a nasty way, and reach for compassionate understanding, caring tone, and wise words.”

Similarly, I can't fully accept a destructive part of *you* unless I set an *external boundary* to protect you from harming me unnecessarily. That's why you're lying if you tell your unfaithful spouse, “Go ahead, and see your lover. There's nothing I can do, but I still love and accept you.”

There *are* things you can do—and need to do—to take a stand against the craziness, even if you're resolved to love and accept your partner “for better or worse.” For instance, “Stop seeing him

or move out,” “We need to get into therapy or I’m leaving,” or “Let’s go see a mediator to find out our rights and responsibilities if we divorce, because I’m certainly going to divorce you if you don’t stop this affair and work with me to heal our marriage.” These are courageous external boundaries around hurtful behavior.

Reason #41: Affairs always create unhealthy boundaries. Lying boundaries corrupt our values, leading to fewer healthy boundaries—which are central to happiness. Healthy boundaries flow from clear resolve congruent with compassionate values. Purging your email for incriminating signs, getting your stories straight when lying about trysts, or refusing to share feelings and thoughts with your spouse, reflect muddy resolve and compromised values—corruptions of the boundary setting process that arrest development.

Internal and external boundaries are not punishments. They are not “an eye for an eye,” or “a pound of flesh.” Punishment rarely accomplishes anything. Study after study has shown punishment worsening situations and contaminating relationships. To the contrary, boundaries are expressions of health and love—resolved stands we take *against* violence and *for* love. Healthy boundaries result from embracing sacred responsibilities to serve the highest good.

So, to grow internally, we need to *know*, *accept*, and *protect* different parts of ourselves. To grow relationally, we need to *know* and *accept* our partner, and *protect* ourselves (to the best of our abilities) from their destructive side, which in turn helps protect them from doing us harm. We provide such protection with internal and external boundaries.

Since the way relationships and individuals develop is by knowing, accepting and protecting different aspects of themselves and others, and allowing superior perspectives and behaviors to supplant inferior ones, anything that interferes with the first crucial step—*knowing*—throws a wrench into the whole process. *Shadow* is those things we resist *knowing*. We can’t know/accept/protect something we can’t perceive.

Reason #42: If you really love your secret paramour, set your lover free. Usually (not always) an affair means we're in love. We adore our lover and want what's best for him or her. We obsess, easily become jealous and possessive, crave emotional and physical contact, and suffer when our beloved suffers. The most generous gift we can offer is to set our lover free. A frequent affair blind spot is refusal to see how selfish it is to enable someone we love to stay in such an ultimately destructive relationship.

Every rationalization is a loophole that conceals shadowy parts of ourselves that we resist knowing, accepting, and protecting.

Let's explore a sampler of loopholes and especially look for shadow. Remember, we're painting with broad strokes here. The shadow material I suggest lurking behind a particular loophole might or might not be present, but you can bet there is *always* something hidden beneath loopholes. Shadow is the rich territory we mine in psychotherapy. As shadow is known, accepted, and protected, people develop, relationships improve, and wounds heal.

The following are some common rationalizations/loopholes for infidelity, and typical distorted beliefs that simmer beneath the surface of awareness:

I can't help it.

"I was out on the town on a Friday night, and this beautiful girl was interested. I can't help it." "He and I got to be such good friends. One afternoon I looked at him and realized I loved him; I couldn't help it."

First of all, as with most loopholes, we can't change the past, so it's not particularly productive to examine history for mistakes in order to feel ashamed/guilty/embarrassed/sad/angry. It is useful to reflect how we set ourselves up for disasters. The loophole in, "I can't help it," is the belief there are circumstances beyond our control where we have no choice but to cheat and lie.

Really?

We always have choice. A whole branch of psychology called, "Choice theory," so moved William Glasser—the father of Reality Therapy which he designed to relentlessly focus on practically solving immediate problems—that he reimagined his whole

approach around the fact that others don't control us, but rather we control ourselves in each moment by making choice after choice.

The shadow behind, "I can't help it," is ignoring how we pretend to hold the value of being faithful, while allowing a habit of, "It's sometimes OK to cheat," to develop. Such dissonance does not bear much scrutiny. When finally realizing, "I *chose* to cheat and lie, I'm committed to cleaning up ground zero," you'll simultaneously feel shame and relief—shame at doing wrong, and relief you have the power and will to do right.

Reason #43: You can change tomorrow's past right now. *After car wrecks, ski accidents, financial disasters, or DUI's, people look back and wish desperately to change the past. "If only I hadn't been texting while I was taking Eli to school," "I should never have gone down the black diamond run," "What was I thinking having those last two drinks for the road?" are all examples. In the stages of grief, this is called, "bargaining," and—like other grief stages of denial, depression, anger, and acceptance—naturally occurs in response to sudden, sickening loss or trauma. If you let yourself start or continue a secret affair, you will look back eventually and try to change your decisions and behaviors, regretting each missed opportunity to do right and heal. If you decide—right now—to look for blindspots, set boundaries, and live your deepest values, you'll regret less and heal faster in the weeks and months to come.*

I'm just wired to be unfaithful.

Strangely, there is more evidence supporting this loophole than most others. Vasopressin and oxytocin are intimate bonding hormones released by the pituitary in response to—among other things—sex and intimacy. Vasopressin is famously present in the brains of male prairie voles, who mate for life and become clinically depressed when deprived of their "wives." Elevated vasopressin causes males to compete with other males and to pair-bond with females. In humans, the length of the vasopressin expression gene (there are seventeen different lengths) is positively

linked with a guy's tendency to monogamy. So, when talking about pair-bonding and the vasopressin gene, size really does matter.

Similarly, some people are naturally more sexually aware and interested—often from infancy onward. Early psychoanalytic researchers believed that this was due to early abuse, or other “sexualization.” Well, that wasn't true for me. I was a secure, well protected little boy who was erotically drawn to Stephanie next door and Eric across the street until the neighborhood parents shut down our little look/touch club. We now know that although abuse *can* have a sexualizing effect, *all kids develop more or less interested in sexuality.*

Further, elevated testosterone in both men and women is associated with mastery, success, and sexual urgency. More testosterone equals more interest in sex. On the other hand, women—higher in bonding hormones estrogen and oxytocin—are more likely to obsess about romance.

One of my favorite studies demonstrating biology directing behavior is the famous 1995 tee-shirt experiment where women were asked to sniff sweaty shirts from lots of guys and rate their relative sexual interest just from *smell*. Women tended to give high scores to guys whose immune systems were most different from theirs, which would predispose possible offspring to have more robust immune systems. In a related experiment, women found men with exaggerated male facial features (pronounced jaws, eyebrows, and cheekbones)—indicating high levels of testosterone—more attractive than other men, but only when the women were ovulating and maximally fertile (it didn't hold true for women on birth control pills). This has actually led to current speed dating events where men and women sniff clothes worn by others to choose who to get to know better.

Genetic/physiological influences on eroticism show up big in homosexuality. Male homosexuality has been associated with number of older brothers, enthusiasm of mothers for sex and male companionship, and consistent brain differences from heterosexual

men. Homosexual men seek far more sexual partners than their heterosexual counterparts, and—given that lesbians and heterosexual women have similar sexual frequency and number of partners—this is further proof that biological variables affect sexual relationships.

Helen Fisher has demonstrated three distinct but interrelated neural/behavioral systems involving sexuality—simple lust when presented with an attractive partner, romantic infatuation when we fixate obsessively on a specific lover, and intimate bonding when we are moved to protect, nest, and coparent with another. All mammals exhibit these three systems, and 3% of mammals are wired to bond monogamously with a specific other—though still available for casual sexual hookups and romantic infatuation. Humans can lust after one person, romantically obsess about another, and pair bond with a third *all at the same time*.

Reason #44: Sexual/romantic/bonding systems work best in harmony with family, love, and values. These three systems can work harmoniously through two partners understanding them and cooperating to normalize reflexive lust, consciously keep romance alive and growing, and self-regulate impulses to erotically bond with others. We know this from studying long term happy couples who's brains light up like romantically infatuated lovers, but who also have developed consistent calming and secure regulatory neural circuits (see neuroscience sidebar). Considering or pursuing secret affairs throws a huge monkey wrench into this delicate machinery, neurobiologically scrambling efforts to improve marital bliss.

Predispositions mature and deepen with socialization, which ideally should make everything easier and more conducive to thriving sexuality and healthy families. Unfortunately, we have few competent cultural initiations into different levels of sexuality. Fundamentalist Christian groups stridently insist sex education be done in the family. Unable to block sex education entirely, they were instrumental in ramming through the federal family law act in 1988, which mandated abstinence-based sex education (a law that

many public school sex educators now side step with a wink and a nod). In fundamentalist Christian families, only 20% of the kids report ever having a conversation of substance about sex with parents.

Neuroscience sidebar: *Let's look at some fun research findings on neurotransmitters and brain areas involved in lust, love, and bonding:*

- *Lust is mediated by testosterone in both men and women. Jack up testosterone and sexual urgency increases in both sexes.*
- *Men who experience themselves as victorious or dominant have elevated testosterone levels. Men who feel like losers and failures have diminished testosterone, even after just one defeat.*
- **Total loose association:** *I hitchhiked from Santa Barbara to Davis California in 1969 to hang out with my friend Steve at University of California at Davis' homecoming weekend. While there, we took extremely potent LSD and eventually ended up at the Davis monkey cages. LSD generates a speedy, multidimensional body/universe awareness experience. The morphing landscapes and glowing colors are not the most profound effects. Thinking new forms—right hemisphere intrusions of novel sensations, colors, textures, smells, sounds, and hungers into left hemisphere linear consciousness—has been the most disorienting and fascinating part of some of my psychedelic experiences. That day I felt like a searchlight of consciousness looking for the right focus, and the monkey cages irresistibly drew me. A tribe of rhesus monkeys was housed in an extensive communal compound, but they were obviously there to be experimental subjects, and many chattered and skittered anxiously. Their social hierarchy appeared like a tribal encampment an order of magnitude more primitive than the prehistoric aborigines in the movie, *Quest for Fire*—yet still*

a tribe of non-human social primates. I watched for an indeterminate amount of time. Two females chattered happily. A male screamed and attacked another male who fled in terror, shitting and pissing. Babies clung to mothers who managed them with careless competence. I lost myself in the chattering conversations, dramatic power displays, triumphs and tragedies, and felt illuminated with the same insight that Teilhard de Chardin had generated decades before. Consciousness and social engagement exist in levels all the way down past cellular consciousness, and all the way up through unity.

- *Romantic infatuation—crazy love—is mediated by increased dopamine and norepinephrine—excitement neurotransmitters—in the ventral tegmental area and the caudate nucleus of the brain stem. These brain areas are associated with addiction and obsessive-compulsive disorder. This is the kind of information that we get from experiments on monkeys like the ones I saw at Davis. It speaks to the complexity of our social networks, that tormenting other species is acceptable if it serves our own. I really am grateful to those who pursue this difficult path. Somebody’s got to do it, and I’ve been impressed with the biologists I’ve encountered over the years.*
- *Romantic infatuation and obsessive-compulsive disorder both involve diminished serotonin, the neurotransmitter that many anti-depressants—like Prozac, Paxil, and Effexor— increase. Helen Fisher thinks these antidepressants, in raising serotonin levels, compromise our abilities to fall in love, and—sure enough—the most common distressing side effects of these drugs are diminished libido and difficulty achieving orgasm.*
- *Arousal and orgasm release cascades of vasopressin and oxytocin in to our brains, making us feel close and cozy with whomever we just shared an orgasm with.*

- *Pair-bonding—where people are moved to join together to protect and care for each other and raise a family—is mediated by oxytocin (especially in women) and vasopressin (especially in men).*
- *Long term in-love couples' brain areas light up in the same places as enthusiastic new lovers. But, why aren't they anxious, urgent, and obsessed like new lovers? Long term in-love people additionally show development in their raphe systems and periaqueductal white matter, areas that provide confidence and calm to soothe the obsessive urgency of romantic infatuation without interfering with "in-love" sexiness and specialness.*

Reason #45: Having sex with another risks falling in love. *Since we tend to biochemically fall in love with people we have sex with (sex releases cascades of testosterone, dopamine, vasopressin, and oxytocin), it pays to be especially particular about whom we have sex with. This hot man who wants me, but will he be solid support if things get tough? Will this beautiful, erotically radiant woman be compassionate and understanding if I have to stop our affair because my wife finds out, or my love with her gets too stressful/crazy/obsessive?*

Reason #46: Joyful monogamy is the best path to a harmonious body/mind system. *Given that a harmonious body/mind system is optimal for happiness and health, what relationship styles offer the best chances of success? Secret affairs stress us out and make us sick. Unhappy marriages leave us miserable and—in a particularly unfair male/female difference—result in unhappily married women having shorter lives than single or happily married women, while unhappily married men still live longer than single men. Single men tend to have the shortest lives. Single women and men can be healthy, but often yearn for love fulfilled. Joyful monogamy is clearly the statistical alpha dog in the longevity, healthy, happy life group of relationship options.*

Biochemistry, shame dynamics, relationship issues, cultural limitations, and identity issues all combine to make people more/less sexually/romantically urgent and more/less able to be aware of and regulate sexual/romantic impulses. Getting back to our loophole, “I’m just wired to be unfaithful,” this means some people *are* more wired to be tempted, impulsive, less educated about sexual relationships, and less *constitutionally* able to self-regulate sexual/romantic impulses.

On the other hand, self-aware consciousness gets to choose thought and action. We all have the option to move steadily toward satisfying monogamy if we decide and keep deciding that’s what we want.

I’ve had clients who spend years being promiscuous or celibate, and then choose the promise of committed monogamy. These are beautiful transformations. On the other hand, the process of deciding can be torturous.

Rob.

Rob is in his late forties and has never been faithful. He is divorced and living with Julie, a much younger lover who—strangely—is more mature in many ways than any of his previous partners, including his ex-wife:

Rob: “This porn actress, Candy, called me and wants to come up and spend the weekend while Julie is out of town.”

Keith: “What did you tell her?”

Rob: He laughs charmingly: “I told her to come on up.”

Keith: “OK. So, what’s going to happen?”

Rob: “Come on. You know what’s going to happen. We’ll spend the weekend fucking each other’s brains out.”

Keith: “Sounds like a lot of fun. You enjoy and appreciate women.”

Rob: “Yeah, but I’m a little worried about Julie.”

Keith: “Worried?”

Rob: “She’s pretty wild, but I know it will hurt her if she finds out.”

Keith: “What are the consequences to you of keeping the secret?”

Rob: Looking somewhat confused. “What do you mean? There are no consequences if she doesn’t find out.”

Keith: “Do you have any other secrets from Julie?”

Rob: “No. We’ve been totally open.”

Keith: “So, if Candy comes up, parties all weekend, and leaves, you have a major secret. How does that affect your relationship?”

Rob: “I don’t know, but I don’t like the idea of not being open with Julie. I prize that so much with her.”

Keith: “Yes. I think the transparency you share is pretty wonderful.”

Rob: “You think I should cancel Candy, don’t you?”

Keith: “Absolutely. A lot of therapists will tell you that they don’t have an opinion, but we always have opinions. I think your no-secrets relationship with Julie is worth whatever fun you might have with Candy. When you hide significant material from your lover, it can diminish intimacy.”

Rob: Laughing: “Thanks for your opinion...I think.” We both laugh.

This conversation is much easier in individual therapy. Couples therapy is often more explosive. One partner openly wavering over whether to cheat or lie makes for tense, highly charged sessions. A husband teeters on the edge of choosing monogamy over promiscuity, while his wife seethes and despairs. A wife openly worries about how her lover will deal with losing her, while her husband struggles with humiliation and rage.

I often tell such couples, “There is a finite number of times you can go to this unresolved, ambivalent place without one of you pulling the plug. I suggest you choose a direction consistent with your deepest hearts.”

This couples-therapy-being-more-stressful dynamic is possibly a partial explanation for why Consumer Reports found 80% of people satisfied with individual therapy while only 35% satisfied with couples’ therapy. Couples’ therapy brings emotional/relational drama into the present moment, challenging therapists to work with shifting, interconnected states of consciousness that evoke deepest defenses. I find such work exhilarating, often more challenging than individual work, but also potentially more

satisfying when couples break through blocks to sweeter intimacy and more secure, passionate connections.

“My wife is a bitch,” or, “My husband is such an asshole.”

First of all, I never doubt that whoever says these words has had some horrible times. Also, if your wife is truly a bitch, or your husband is truly as asshole, it might be best to leave them anyway.

Asshole sidebar: *During a session a particularly socially clued in client of mine said, “My friend George just told me the asshole rule.” I smiled and said, “OK, I’m interested. Tell me the asshole rule.” He sat down and said, “If you go about your life and—every once in awhile—you run into somebody who seems like an asshole, they probably are an asshole. If you go about your life and everybody you meet seems to be an asshole, then you’re probably the asshole.”*

There is deep wisdom in this rule, and I’ve since considered it often.

On the other hand, I’ve found that there are usually two sides to every story, and that this bitch/asshole spouse might not be such a bad person after all. They often have their own narrative, which is more complimentary to them, and it does make you crabby if your spouse is cheating on you, whether you consciously know about it or not. The shadow here is the primitive idea that if someone treats you badly, it’s a good idea to treat *him or her* badly. Think about it. Does it help your wife be more loving and less critical to cheat on her? Is your husband likely to become less dismissive and abusive if you sexually betray him? What shadow lies beneath your desire to punish and/or cheat back?

Reason #47: Sexual betrayal as a punishment to a nasty or unfaithful spouse just makes things worse for everybody.

Emily.

Emily’s husband, Bob, had a brief affair with a business associate. Emily found out about it, exploded, and then struggled

to maintain her composure in front of the kids until she and Bob could find a therapist and start dealing with the situation.

As I often do in such situations, I began our work with individual sessions with the proviso that I would keep no secrets. I saw Bob first and heard his side of the story—which included his decision to try to save the marriage, and then he left on a business trip and I was able to have a session with Emily. She arrived at my office looking exceptionally beautiful, which gave me a clue as to how she was processing his affair:

Keith: “How are you doing with all this?”

Emily: “Tell me why I shouldn’t go out and have an affair? *He* did. Why not me?”

Keith: “What would it accomplish?”

Emily: Looking indignant. “He got to go fall in love. Now it’s my turn.”

Keith: “So, you yearn for romantic infatuation, but not with Bob.”

Emily: “No way. If he thinks he’s going to have sex with me, he has another think coming. He’s an asshole.”

Keith: “What do you make of the fact that this affair stirred your yearning for romantic love, but not with Bob?”

Emily: She looks confused, which is a good thing. Confusion often marks the threshold to shadowy defensive blind spots. “What do you mean?”

Keith: “In your family of origin, when people acted badly—especially your father and brother—did you collapse in a heap, or become super-autonomous and self-sufficient?”

Emily: A look of dawning comprehension appears on her face. “You know I got more self-sufficient.”

Keith: “You could never count on them to work on themselves and resolve their issues enough care for you. This strengthened neural circuits to become autonomous and detached when important masculine figures collapse. You are angry and distrustful of Bob, and the option of getting your needs met with him doesn’t even see attractive.”

Emily: Sarcasm. “Do *you* think we could be happy lovers together?”

Keith: “We’ll never know unless you try.”

Reason #48: Your affair can motivate your partner to cheat which—even if it relieves your guilt—ultimately causes more damage.

If your spouse is unkind, cruel, unfaithful, or relentlessly uncaring, cheating on them gives them further justification for more vile beliefs and actions in a downward spiral of violence. Challenge your spouse to change, offer to seek help, or set boundaries around contempt, criticism, and cruelty. If your partner rises to the challenge and makes positive changes, it suggests desires to be a better, more loving person and you're providing a growth opportunity. If you get nothing back but hostile, dismissive, or stonewalling responses, perhaps he or she is not the right life-partner for you.

I have needs that aren't being met.

With guys, these tend to be sexual needs. With women, these tend to be needs for intimate communication, non-violent problem solving, and sharing a life. That being said, I've encountered plenty of men and women who fall into either camp.

The idea that a deficit in intimacy with a husband or wife can be balanced out by an intimate relationship with another is not a new invention. In eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, courtesans provided wealthy men with intelligent, educated, sexy feminine partners in largely culturally sanctioned ways. This was also true for thousands of years in the East with Geishas, temple dancers, and tantric practitioners. Unfortunately for those—mostly men—who see this as justification for straying, the equal power and unique demands of modern marriage don't tolerate a man having relationships with courtesans, geishas, or temple dancers. It also doesn't tolerate women having affairs with coworkers, yoga instructors, or soccer coaches. As illustrated by the above example with Emily and Bob, pretending that a modern marriage can be balanced or improved by a spouse secretly getting intimate/sexual needs met by others is a loophole that doesn't require much inquiry to be debunked.

What *can* work is courageous talk and action with a partner on the frustrated yearning of, "I'm not getting my needs met." If such

talk goes south—as it often does—the conversation provides a natural lead in to finding help somewhere.

Reason #49: Joyful monogamy is the gold standard for mutual spiritual development. *Deepest consciousness joining with devotional love deepening over years and decades generates waves of transformative bliss. Ask Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, who built the Taj Mahal in memory of his wife, Mumtaz Mahal. The tantric spiritual traditions teach joining in mutual harmony with all energies, voices, and perspectives to integrate towards unity with pure spirit. Partners choosing expanding love become tantric adepts, opening each other deeper to God.*

My wife/husband doesn't know, so what's the harm?

This is a favorite, with the added loophole of, “I can't believe how clueless he/she is.” We already demonstrated earlier with Rob how keeping emotionally charged secrets separates you from your partner. Besides, since we are always connected in subtle energetic ways to our intimates, a betrayed spouse usually senses something wrong. Dean Radin and his colleagues taught husbands to attune to wives who had illnesses, and focus healing energy at them during training sessions. After practicing for months, Radin took the husbands and wives into a laboratory where they were separated by concrete walls and steel doors and hooked up to biosensors. Computers randomly generated times for the husbands to direct loving attention to their wives. When a man attuned and focused loving energy, in her separate room his wife relaxed, her endocrine system harmonized, and stress chemicals diminished. In a related experiment, experimenters asked subjects to think nasty thoughts about algae in an adjoining room. The algae receiving the negative attention died and withered significantly more than algae which had people focusing “nice algae” thoughts. Even though people are a lot more complicated than algae, I assume when one spouse cheats on another—either compartmentalizing him or her, or passive aggressively attacking from unresolved resentments—negative energetic transfers happen that don't feel particularly good.

Also—especially in this day of email, computers, easily accessible phone records, and message machines—suspicious spouses eventually find smoking guns.

Kevin and Maggie.

Kevin kept a secret affair going eighteen months, was caught by his wife Maggie, and both sought help from me. After many sessions dealing with the residual lies, recriminations, outraged threats, and confused rationalizations, their marriage got into quite a pleasant groove. One of Kevin's early rationalizations was that he never intended Maggie to know, and was protecting her by keeping the affair secret—a loophole that was—not surprisingly—met with some scorn by Maggie, and quickly debunked in the early weeks of treatment. As they processed the previous year and a half, each kept coming up with episodes which—in retrospect—were clearly influenced and contaminated by Kevin's secret life. During an individual session, Kevin and I began to talk about how it *actually* had been with Maggie during the affair:

Kevin: “It was strange. I still wanted her and the kids, still wanted sex with her, and knew I'd never get a divorce. In retrospect, I was shut down and irritable a lot. When Maggie would ask me what was on my mind, I'd lie to her and be mad about that.

Keith: “What does this suggest to you?”

Kevin: “That I was kidding myself thinking there was no harm because she didn't know. *I* knew, and that affected me tremendously.”

Keith: “It feels good to wake up to stuff like this, doesn't it?”

Kevin: Smiles and nods ruefully. “Yeah. I could have picked an easier way to do it.”

He sure could have. On the other hand, this particular crisis was handled so well by Kevin and Maggie that both of them grew more in the six months after Maggie discovered the affair than in any comparable period of both their lives. Already relatively psychologically sophisticated (they'd been having intermittent sessions with me for years, though Kevin had hidden his affair from me as well as Maggie), they both powerfully committed to shared growth and bliss during the aftermath and made impressive progress in communication, hot sex, parenting, managing money, and dealing with relatives. After processing an extended secret

affair, all these other issues felt somehow more accessible to both of them.

Reason #50: Secret affairs can create surprisingly distressing disconnections from your husband or wife. *A friend of mine once cheated, and his wife divorced him. He said to me he would have gone back with her, but she wouldn't consider it. He bitterly regretted the affair that shattered his family. Clearly, he didn't expect she would leave him forever after "just" one transgression, and was appalled by her refusal to consider reconciliation. Most modern couples make some attempt to reconcile after a secret affair, but not all, often leaving cheating spouses shocked at the magnitude of their loss.*

He/she is abusive emotionally, physically, or sexually.

This is an especially dangerous loophole for everybody. Abuse is a powerful word that means a whole range of ugly things.

Some abuse—like physical assault and sexual molestation—demands immediate action, often from police or other official agencies. If you—or your children—are being physically damaged or sexually assaulted, go to a safe place and call the cops.

Emotional abuse is trickier. Most people are patronizing, contemptuous, or nasty on occasion. Some are intensely and pervasively this way, and everyone agrees this leads to emotionally damaging relationships. The dangerous part of this loophole is that your abusive spouse probably has relatively little impulse control to start with. People who are good self-regulators rarely allow themselves to be abusive. This leaves the ominous recipe of an impulsive, violent person suddenly discovering the overwhelming humiliation of an unfaithful spouse.

Too many murders and assaults on wives, lovers, husbands, children, and others have been committed by jealous, violent partners throughout the ages. At this moment, all over the world, men and women—mostly testosterone driven men in the case of physical violence—insane with jealousy, rage, and hurt, are striking, wounding, and killing people they love.

If you are in an abusive relationship, get professional help right now. If your spouse abuses you and you are involved in an affair, stop your affair and get help now. If you are considering an affair, and feel justified because your partner is abusive, get help now. Talking yourself into doing nothing in the face of abuse—or, even worse, punishing your abusive spouse indirectly with betrayal—are loopholes to avoid taking responsibility for your destructive relationship and continued victimization. A secret affair is a passive aggressive counterattack on your abuser—a counterattack that can unleash unimaginable horrors.

Reason #51: Cheating in response to abuse attacks passive-aggressively and provokes further abuse.

My lover says the marriage is over and he/she plans on leaving soon. They don't even sleep in the same bed anymore.

If a guy cheats on his wife, he's much more likely to cheat on you, and the same goes for a woman who goes out on her husband. Quite often when couples begin their relationship with a secret affair (one or both of them is cheating on a lover), years down the road another secret affair shows up, and not always with the original unfaithful partner. If a destructive capacity is not processed by a couple with firm resolve to close loopholes, it is likely to show up again in some form.

Reason #52: Having an affair makes you more likely to be cheated on yourself in the future.

In my book on Integrally informed psychotherapy, *Waking Up*, I call this an example of the “brutal physics” of relationships. Brutal physics refers to principles that show up repetitively and violently in human experience where certain phenomena have predictable results, like with gravity and thermodynamics. Lack of awareness of such principles as, “cheating makes you more likely to be cheated on,” results in huge gaps in training children and adolescents in the forces that shape sexual polarity and committed relationships. Other examples of brutal physics are “Violence breeds more violence,” “Coercing capitulation diminishes love,”

“Unhappily married parents predispose children to unhappy lover relationships,” and John Gottman’s research finding that ratio of fewer than five positive statements for each negative statement about a spouse amplifies probability of divorce.

The “I’m leaving my marriage anyway,” loophole seems to show up more with men than with women. Your lover saying he’s leaving his wife is *a long way* from leaving. If an adorable and very attentive man or woman tells you they’re unhappy in their marriage and are planning to leave soon, please tell them, “Call me after you’ve moved out.” If you are seriously considering leaving your spouse, and think, “I’m leaving anyway. I might as well cheat,” *leave first*.

This especially makes a difference to children. Whether your children are one or thirty-one, after you divorce you will eventually have conversations about what happened. It can ultimately be morally defensible to explain you left their mother or father *before* you started dating others. If you started dating first, it can turn into years of condemnation from kids, alienated affections, and loss of opportunities to effectively parent.

I have sexual yearnings he/she finds disgusting.

I’ve had clients who get off erotically dominating or be dominated. Sometimes this is a mild craving, and sometimes it is a burning hunger. I’ve had clients with similar attitudes towards lingerie, semi-public sex, and gay or lesbian adventures. These cravings cause problems when they are urgent beyond belief—true fetishes—or when partners express disapproval or disgust at the very idea.

Having your most charged, secret, and often forbidden sexual yearnings and fantasies met with contempt or disapproval can be devastating, and leaves residues of shame and rage, often separating spouses. Esther Perel in *Mating in Captivity* makes the point that sharing potentially shameful secrets only supports intimacy in an accepting atmosphere. Condemnation and disapproval tends to drive couples deeper into resentful loneliness.

Such sharing as part of a growth change process with the ultimate goals of enhanced passion and intimacy can move marriages through conflict and towards love.

Affairs seem to offer a delicious shortcut to sexual acceptance. Erotic yearnings can expand like wildfires if we find lovers who'll indulge our kinks, and in the romantic infatuation intoxication, partners are more motivated to stretch boundaries. I've worked with people who routinely have sexual adventures with secret lovers they'd never consider with spouses. To a married person with a kink and an unaccepting spouse, it can be enormously tempting when an attractive other indicates that he or she will indulge—even get off on—forbidden sexual activities.

***Personal story sidebar:** Back in 1981 before I was either married or a monogamous person, I had a brief, passionate relationship with a lovely woman while Becky was gone on an extended trip. It wasn't a secret affair: Becky and I could never keep secrets from each other. Though I didn't know it, it was destined to be the last time I had sex with anyone but Becky. A signature moment in that relationship came one sunny afternoon when my lover and I were lounging in post coital bliss, and she asked me, "What gets you off? What are your secret sexual fantasies?" I was shocked at my reaction. I didn't trust her with that stuff—material I could share openly with Becky. The discrepancy blew my mind—how could I be willing to have a love affair with this woman, yet not trust her with vulnerable secrets that I had no problem sharing with Becky? This led to later realizations that I needed courage, commitment, and monogamy to keep going deeper into intimacy and eroticism.*

The shadow beneath the, "I have sexual yearnings he/she finds disgusting," loophole is the fact that it's generally destructive to label your spouse's sexual yearnings sick, forbidden, sinful, or pathological, especially since most such cravings primarily exist in fantasy—they are images or ideas. Fantasizing about multiple partners, bondage, kinks, or transgressive sex is not the same as engaging in the behaviors themselves. *Yearnings* are not *behaviors*. *Thoughts* are not *actions*. Even if you don't share your feminine

partner's delight in the idea of being masterfully ravished, or your masculine partner's fascination with having two women at the same time, you can accept the legitimacy of their longing.

Erotic yearnings need to be explored with gentleness and acceptance. Happy partners rarely share all sexual proclivities, but they need to feel sexuality accepted and welcomed by each other. She doesn't have to like porn, just not make you wrong for enjoying it. He doesn't have to get off on spanking you, just accept that it turns you on. Sometimes generous spouses engage in kinky sexual play as a gift. She can wear high heels to bed, though it feels a little awkward. He might initiate sex on the couch during the day, even though he's a little worried that the mailman might knock at the door. Whether sexual kinks get practiced or not, dismissing or attacking your partner's desires—or allowing your partner to dismiss or attack yours—is a bad idea and deserves attention until both of you can feel accepting and accepted. Otherwise, it is a potential loophole waiting to happen.

Reason #53: Humiliating kinky sex in affairs is more likely to be discovered and publicized than in happy marriages. Husbands and wives, even when conflicted, seem to share a certain confidentiality about private embarrassing or potentially humiliating traits, tendencies, and experiences. I've found this confidentiality less common with secret affair lovers. Additionally, after the affair is discovered, there is a pissed off spouse who is probably less motivated to protect you from public humiliation.

It's only recreational sex.

William was a bisexual client of mine who loved having sex with married guys. He felt he offered something wives couldn't (arguably true), and there were few complications. He liked sex without responsibilities or complications, his friends liked having secret sex with him, and, as far as he could see, nobody got hurt. His loophole was, "It's only recreational sex."

William said he enjoyed sex immensely with his wife April, never fell in love with his partners, and believed that as a bisexual he had a special dispensation on the sexual faithfulness rule.

I liked William and April, and was sad when they divorced. When William finally was resolved enough to discuss his multiple infidelities with April, she discovered herself past the point of no return. William kept maintaining the “harmlessness” of his liaisons—essentially defending his loophole—and April kept moving farther away emotionally. He never realized that his lies of commission and omission (“I had to work late”), and her knowledge that he could at any time engage in anonymous sex, poisoned their intimacy.

I’ve actually known happy couples who at some time engaged in recreational sex while they were together, almost always relatively early in their relationship before marriage or children, and usually in some shared way. In these cases there were no secrets, no betrayals, and often everybody was doing it in the same room or bed. Such adventures commonly involve “swinging” with another couple or a three-way with another man or woman. I haven’t known happy couples where sex with others became a standard of their marriage, who engaged in it after the first child was born, or who lied to one another about such liaisons.

Even if such adventures end up to be mistakes that cause pain or drama, partners who feel they participate in the decisions and are not kept in the dark seem more willing to accept such events without dramatic loss of trust.

The bottom line for the, “It’s only recreational sex,” loophole, is that sex with another person is never *just* recreational for everybody, and this goes double when we’re married.

Reason #54: Having sex with someone is always a big deal, no matter what you say or believe about it at the time. Research shows that we become more impulsive and reckless when sexually aroused. Letting a distracting attraction blossom into an affair puts two adults into turned-on situations where they unconsciously

work to justify consummating their desires. She may say, “I just want to have fun without complications,” but what happens when she falls in love with you? He may say, “It’s fine with me that you’ll never leave your husband,” but what happens when he says later, “I can’t stand it that you go home to him?”

It’s only strip clubs/prostitutes/on-line/porn.

The demands of masculine, testosterone-driven eroticism—especially sexual urgency and hunger for control over sexual gratification—often lead guys to elaborate relational and autoerotic rituals. Much of this behavior falls into one of two categories, solitary masturbatory practices and explicit sexual relationships.

Solitary masturbatory practices.

Video stimulation from magazines, DVD’s, and—especially these days—the Internet, figures heavily in male masturbation. I’ve found men who also enjoy written pornography, but print erotica seems to appeal more to women, who have voted with their checkbooks to make romance novels—with the obligatory sex scene appearing at the center of the book—their most preferred fiction genre. This is probably due to the primacy of visual stimulation in male arousal—the “I see her I want her” reflex. Men seek out the *image* of erotically radiant women.

Most people enjoy—or have enjoyed—masturbation. This is no doubt a function of our ability to fantasize in the past/present/future combined with needs, associations, and drives. Such practices, along with the accouterments of DVD’s, books, porn sites, erotic fetishes like lingerie/dildos/shoes/props/fantasy games etc, usually aren’t problems unless they expand to where marital sex can’t happen without them, or where someone is compulsively going to them in an uncontrolled fashion—sometimes even preferring them to marital sex. Partners eventually rebel if they *always must* play a role, say a magic word/phrase, wear a certain garment, perform a specific act, or utilize a certain toy. There is a depersonalizing aura around the fetish that makes a partner feel like an object rather than a lover.

Haley and Abe.

Masturbation can be experienced by your spouse as a form of betrayal—especially if you use material she finds objectionable or embarrassing, or if *you* are ashamed or embarrassed by your activities. Either way, transgressive sex that doesn’t involve contact with another person is usually much less toxic to relationships, and can actually be integrated into a couple’s sexual

cosmology through dialogue, development, and wise counsel. Problems arise with secrecy, lack of self-reflection, and critical judgment. Consider the following session with Haley and Abe. They've been together eight years, and Haley is the sexual promoter, while Abe is the resister. The sexual promoter is drawn to advocate for more frequent, varied, or adventurous sex, while the sexual resister tends to reject overtures, experiments, and sexual novelty. Many couples eventually constellate into a resister/promoter pattern with one another:

Haley: "I hate how Abe creates sex images on his computer."

Abe: "What's the harm? I don't do it when you're around."

Haley: "I hate how you make time for it, and then block it when I walk into the room."

Abe: "You should learn to knock."

Haley: "Why should I knock on the door in my own house?"

Keith: "If you both were satisfied and happy with your sex together, how would this be a different conversation?"

Abe: Being somewhat passive-aggressive, and sensing that there will be some pressure here for him to change, he shuts down. "I can't answer hypothetical questions."

Haley: Sarcastically. "O, really? You answer them all the time in your contracting business. I wouldn't be so mad if we had a great sex life. It's that you prefer the computer stuff to me that hurts so much."

Abe: "I can't help who I am. And besides, what's the harm? It's only me creating images on a screen."

Keith: "I agree, Abe. I don't think your computer stuff is the main problem. I think the real issue is you two needing to be more passionately connected as lovers."

I'm not disputing that Haley and Abe aren't genuinely suffering because of Abe's preference for computer-aided masturbation. They are. But their path to progress is much cleaner and accessible because there is not another person involved.

Reason #55: It's more fun to normalize masturbation practices with your wife or husband. It diminishes intimacy to keep shameful autoerotic secrets out of fear of condemnation. That being said, you don't need to "confess" every time you masturbate, or explain in elaborate detail what gets you off. "Normalizing," means letting your spouse know you have an autoerotic life, and that certain themes, images, objects etc have erotic charge for you. If they want to know more, they can ask.

Explicitly sexual relationships.

Contrast Abe and Haley with Glen and Jane, who came into treatment with Jane devastated over discovering Glen participating in an on-line chat room where members passed erotic notices, instructions, and directions back and forth:

Glen: "I don't get it. It's only a chat room. I don't even use my real name. It's just people playing. I'm not cheating or anything."

Jane: "Well, then who's 'Precious?' I saw your email. It was disgusting the things you were saying."

Glen: Shifting around uncomfortably and looking away in embarrassment. "That's just how it works. Most people do it because they want to add spice to their life and don't want to cheat."

Keith: "It doesn't seem like cheating to you because it is only on-line and with anonymous people?"

Glen: Defiantly. "Yes."

Keith: "How about if Jane had an anonymous guy she exchanged sexual messages and material with? Would that bother you?"

Glen: "No. Why should it?"

Keith: "Just consider her doing exactly what you're doing. Eager to contact the guy. Excited about hot sexual scenes she's cooked up. Interested in following his directions when she masturbates. Wanting to spend more time..." Glen interrupts me.

Glen: "OK, OK, I get it. I don't like how that sounds."

Such sexual transgressions become more toxic as they get more personal. For instance, women hate husbands frequenting strip clubs. I empathize with this in many ways, mostly because of the psychology of the cultures. Strip clubs are organized socially around transgressive sexual hierarchies where the top rung for

women is a sugar daddy and for men is a porn queen who wants a special relationship with him. That being said, wives hate husbands visiting strip clubs, but find lap dances *even more* distressing, and *worse* with favorite dancers. Explicit sex with prostitutes feels awful, but falling in love with a specific prostitute is horrific...you get the picture. The more extensively another entity is actively/ personally involved in an erotic relationship, the more spouses hurt and the more effort and struggle it takes to heal. I use “entity” because—on line—you don’t know for sure the age, gender, or orientation of your partner.

The blind spot here is that erotic interplay between two conscious beings is infidelity that *feels the same as a secret affair* in most ways to everyone concerned.

The, “It’s only strip clubs/prostitutes/on-line chatting” loophole subtly creates classes of people—usually women—who are designated sex objects with fewer rights and less social worth than other women. Interestingly, both spouses often unconsciously share this double standard while processing transgressions with sex workers and online partners. A cheating husband will speak disparagingly of his illicit partner, sharing his wife’s contempt (“She was only a hooker.”). Wives like Jane often will be infuriated at sexism socially or professionally and righteously indignant at the exploitation of women in the sex-trade industry and online, but then furiously trash and despise their husbands’ sex-trade or online partners.

Reason #56: I’ve never known anybody who frequents strip clubs or prostitutes to feel satisfied and at peace with their sexual existence. You want sexual fulfillment? Create passionate intimacy with someone you can also respect, not fantasy sex with emotionally wounded sex workers.

Reason #57: Secret sex with others destroys marriages, no matter what form it takes. Two conscious entities creating transgressive erotic polarities in the crucible of a committed lover relationship is

endearing and inspiring. Two conscious entities creating transgressive erotic polarities that betray others fascinates us, but is consistently morally condemned, and—ultimately—a source of selfish suffering.

I'm only staying for the children anyway

One study showed 67% of first time parents having a sharp drop in marital satisfaction after the child arrived. Kids are hard on marital satisfaction. Of the rest, half had no change in satisfaction and half reported *improved* marital relationships. When the 16% improved couples were interviewed further, it was revealed that both partners took the time and energy to know and support each other, even in the cataclysmic changes caused by the advent of their first child.

Practically everybody loves their children and wants them to thrive. What is rarely taught in our culture is that a top factor in children thriving is having parents who make the efforts needed to have an ever-expanding love. To help your children grow well, take a stand for increasing love/satisfaction with your spouse. Rather than stay in an unhappy marriage for your children, do them a real favor and co-create a happy parental marriage.

Rosalie and Kent

Rosalie and Kent entered therapy after she caught him in midst of an affair with Marie, a mutual friend. To Kent, the affair was a minor transgression that was resolved when he broke it off and promised, “Never again”. To Rosalie it was a catastrophe that shattered social networks, horribly injured marital trust, and revealed Kent as dishonorable and untrustable. To some partners, when these lines are crossed, irreversible damage is inflicted and they can't imagine ever feeling secure again.

Kent was shocked at the impact of his affair on Rosalie. He had no idea what was at stake when he allowed his distracting attraction with Marie to accelerate into secrete meetings, sexual contact, and obfuscation. Nevertheless, he loved Rosalie and their kids and committed to doing whatever it took to help the marriage

heal. They both worked hard, and—very gradually—trust was restored and both began to feel more securely connected again.

Unfortunately, Rosalie had a personality structure that could switch to very dark perspectives—deep-rooted defensive states—under stress. When restimulated by Kent’s irritating habits or by memories of the affair, she tended to despair and predict bad outcomes. In one individual session we were having about six months into treatment, his desire to go on a surf trip with his friends cued her darkness. Furious at his “selfishness” and railing about how immature he was, Rosalie told me angrily in an individual session, “I’m only staying until the children go to college. I don’t see how we could be together after that.”

Sometimes when I hear such distorted views, my instinct is to call my client’s bluff. I took a deep breath, and considered how much Rosalie and Kent loved each other and the kids when she wasn’t so pissed off. I didn’t want this kind of discussion to be a staple of our sessions or of her thinking, so I said, “I don’t think that’s an adequate reason to stay. You and Kent might want to go talk to a mediator about your rights and responsibilities if you divorce.”

This response infuriated Rosalie. “I can’t believe a marriage counselor would say something like this! It’s irresponsible! You don’t just suggest people divorce. That’s wrong!”

It took me a while to earn back Rosalie’s trust, but she stopped making “After the kids leave,” references and became more available to different perspectives when she was upset. She was rock solid on the “do not cheat,” value, but unaware that cultivating a belief that staying married for any reason other than Kent was the man she wanted, opened her—and him—to potential infidelity loopholes.

Reason #58: Incredible craziness can be cued by sexual betrayal. Often you don’t see your spouse’s deepest defenses until they’ve been evoked by trauma. If **you** are the source of that trauma, he or she can recalibrate their entire sense of who you are, and

sometimes never come back to seeing you as a good person worthy of sharing a life with. Worse, this attitude is transmitted to kids, creating all kinds of conflicts aggravated by mutually despising parents who used to love each other.

“I’m having an affair because I don’t want to put the children through a divorce.”

This is related to, “I’m only staying for the children,” but different in significant ways. Moral decisions based on blind conformity—like, “never put children through divorce”—rather than relativistic values can create weird belief systems where people engage in destructive behaviors, justified by religious loopholes, often self-righteously invoked. This is characteristic of conformist worldviews where the “Law” is found in the sacred “Book,” and scientifically supported facts are dismissed out of hand when they disagree with the “Book”—think fundamentalist Christians, Muslims, Jews, arch-conservative Republicans, and political anarchists. Christian Scientists refusing medical treatment and evangelicals dismissing evolution are good examples of the “Book” trumping science.

Black/white, rigid values are impossible to live by, as in, “It’s wrong to look with lust at women other than my wife.” Also, since conformist systems always have an “inside” group that embraces the “Book,”—thus deserving more respect and care—and an outside group deserving less respect and care, conformist worldviews result in double standards. These double standards normalize different rights for different groups, as in “If you believe what I believe, when you die you go to fun heaven. If you don’t believe what I believe, when you die you burn in bumper Hell for eternity” Current conformist double standards include, “I’m against gays having equal rights, or a woman being able to legally choose abortion, unless that woman or those gay people are my husband, wife, son, daughter, mother, father, good friend, or somebody else special.”

An interesting example of conformist doublethink particularly relevant to infidelity is one study that found 50% of incest aggressors interviewed to be Roman Catholic, a disproportionate percentage from that particular subject population. When asked their rationales for abusing their daughters and stepdaughters (a stepfather is *100 times* more likely to sexually abuse his stepdaughter than a biological father), most of them said it was because they didn't want to cheat on their wives.

What? You didn't want to sin by cheating on your wife, but you're willing to compromise your child's entire life? This is one of the sickest loopholes I've encountered, and—believe me—I've encountered some really sick ones.

Children do hate divorce. Every client I've every interviewed whose parents divorced, told me about it as a signature life event *in the first fifteen minutes of the first session*. Divorce stays with you, predisposes you to relationship problems, and makes your development more dangerous. One tenth of children raised in intact families are eventually diagnosed with psychological disorders, while one fifth of children of divorced families are eventually diagnosed—a *hundred percent* increase. The aphorism, “A peaceful divorce is better for a child than a warlike marriage,” misses the fact that there are few peaceful divorces. On the other hand, the strength of human resilience is such that four fifths of kids in divorced families seem to do fine.

That being said, children *really hate* parents cheating. Mom or Dad cheating is also announced in the first fifteen minutes of our first session, and people *are still disgusted and outraged decades later*. I've had men and women in their thirties, forties, fifties, sixties, and seventies remember a parent who cheated with extraordinary anger. The language is rarely, “Dad cheated on Mom,” or, “Mom went out on Dad.” It is most often, “He/she cheated on *us*.” Yes, your children experience your affair as you cheating on *them*.

Reason #59: If you have an affair, your children will eventually feel betrayed.

Divorce without sexual betrayal is easier for children to accept later in life. As my adult clients deepen and understand the demands and complexities of human existence and modern marriage, they usually come to understand that their parents' divorce was inevitable. These clients gradually forgive parental divorce, and find ways of deepening intimacy with the blended families that usually ensue.

So, do all of us—especially your kids—a favor, and separate from your spouse *first* before you start dating. Yeah, your kids will hate going through a divorce, but they'll be *much more injured* if you cheat. You're not just cheating on your spouse; you're cheating on your kids too.

I can't help myself. I have the opportunity and I have to go for it.

This is similar to, "I'm wired to be unfaithful," but different in that there is a belief that certain opportunities can't be passed up by any reasonable person. You'd think that this would be mostly a male rationalization, and you'd have some justification. Chris Rock once said in a comedy routine, "Men are as faithful as their range of opportunities." Male sexuality is wired visually, and modern society with our exploding population and cultural imaging provides a constant barrage of erotically charged feminine visions. Further, the average twenty-something woman—in *romantic infatuation*—thinks about sex several times a day, and normally about once a day. The average twenty-something guy thinks about sex about once every *fifty-two seconds*. On the other hand, another study showed that with the recent influx of young women into the workforce, the number of young women having secret affairs has *exceeded* the number of men. This caused the authors to conclude that affairs were more about *opportunity* than about gender.

I think the answer lies in the fact that erotic polarity arcs between masculine and feminine individuals, and such polarities cause our brains to seek loopholes in fidelity values. In the absence of clarity of commitment to marriage and full resolve to say, “No” to loopholes, human genius can talk otherwise brilliant and wise individuals into damaging relationships. Einstein was a famous philanderer whose second wife essentially signed on to, “Don’t ask, don’t tell,” until age and infirmity slowed Albert down. Clearly he used his considerable gifts at least partially to rationalize his affairs.

Einstein affair sidebar: *Albert’s first wife, Maric, refused to grant him a divorce when their conflicts—many over his cheating—escalated to the point he became desperate to leave. She finally agreed to divorce on the condition he give her the cash payout if he ever won the Nobel Prize for physics. He said, “Yes,” and, sure enough, when he won the Nobel Prize years later—not for relativity but for how energy is emitted when metal is bombarded with photons—he signed the check over to her. I’ve not seen data on how much infidelity costs in dollars, but I suspect billions—if not tens of billions—each year. That being said, it’s an amazing relationship where one person can accurately predict their spouse will win a Nobel Prize.*

Reason #60: Thinking fogs up in affairs. *No matter how archetypally magnificent your sexual opportunities, betrayal reasoning is never sound. Most people look back at secret affairs and ask themselves incredulously, “What was I thinking?”*

The point here is opportunity always exists in social contexts, and we always have a choice as to what to do with impulses. If we are *fully resolved with no loopholes*, we can choose to be faithful, and—even better—take a stand for warmth, love, and fulfilled eroticism in our marriage. Some naturally do this, some can do this with the right education, some require therapy and inner work, and some—those with compulsive tendencies which have bloomed into sexual addiction—require extensive support in a recovery program. That being said, even the most compulsive, emotionally wounded,

messed up sex addict still *has a choice* each time he or she is tempted to act out.

How can I be expected to love only one other person romantically for the rest of my life? I can love more than one person.

This is a popular loophole with twenty-somethings, but people of all ages have used it. It was a common philosophy in the 1970's when Becky and I were in our twenties, and maybe that's why we're the only couple still together of all couples we knew then.

There is a whole social movement around having extramarital sex called "polyamory," for obvious reasons (if you never took any Latin in school, "poly" means many and "amory" means "love"). The polyamory movement advocates adults expand sexually through networks of consenting, grownup others. It can be a lot of fun if you don't have kids, use condoms, want some adventures, and have a chance to stay with your partner after the adventures blow up into psychosexual drama—as they always do. My experience is that some of us need to go through a sexual experimentation developmental stage, but eventually grow towards joyful monogamy as a gold standard.

Over the years, few have come to me in love with a spouse and a secret paramour and realistically wanting to sustain both relationships—but many have recoiled from the potential loss of their lover. Men often continue a secret affair because it is, "The best sex you can imagine." Interestingly that's often how affairs are manifested—a guy imagines his best sex/romance and recruits a woman to fulfill his fantasies. If she's fulfilling some of hers also, that's even better.

Women usually insist on continuing affairs because they feel bored, rejected, or sexually insipid with their husbands, and then romantically charged with their secret lovers.

Never has a couple come to me wanting to sustain a threesome of some kind. *Never* have they wanted to bring in another couple or a third lover. Couples who want to move deeper and wider with

each other in marriage therapy would be embarrassed to pretend that another lover is a good idea, or exchanging partners with another couple will lead to anything but soap opera.

At some point you either divorce, give up on sexual romance, or commit to erotic fulfillment with one person. When two people share commitment to erotic fulfillment, beautiful things happen, love arising from unexpected places. Commitment to conscious, steadily expanding emotional/erotic bliss activates the interpersonal/psychosexual line of development.

In many spiritual traditions, conscious expansion of love moves couples into the tantric realms where shared intimacy becomes spiritual practice. Such practices advocate finding God/Goddess through blissful communion with pleasure, community, sound, taste, texture, children, passion, lust, and overwhelming tenderness. Passionate monogamous intimacy can deliberately embrace these states and relationships.

I know that the vasopressin expression gene makes it easier for some guys and harder for others to be faithful. But there are also genes that make us struggle more with depression, anxiety, obsession, anger, and delusions. Decision theory asserts, and I agree, that—beginning as small children—we begin to make conscious decisions, continue deciding throughout life, and that these decisions largely determine our universe, relationships, happiness, and intimacies. We can *decide* to integrate towards expanding love, compassion, and deepening consciousness at any moment.

Self-transcendence sidebar: Practice this all the time.

Let's end this chapter with a yogic loophole closer.

Sit comfortably and relax for a minute Breathe deeply in through your nose into your abdomen and let the air out slowly through your mouth. Put your hand over your heart, and, as you breathe deeply in and out, smile, and thank God, Goddess, Spirit, for someone or something wonderful in your life. An intimate

relationship is usually our first association—someone we love. If you don't have such a relationship, create one in your imagination, and be grateful for your human genius of imagination, and power of focus and intent. If you're married, as you practice this exercise recognize the opportunities you have today to enlist your spouse in cocreating satisfying love. If you're not married, as you practice this exercise dedicate yourself to opportunities to cocreate a joyful love affair with a healthy person.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE GIFT OF SHAME.

Hank.

Hank was happily married, but suffered from bouts of depression and anxiety that occasionally led him to urgent obsessing or outbursts of anger. His wife, Tiffany, and children (two teenage sons and a ten-year-old daughter) tolerated this because he was normally such a sweet guy, and he always apologized after explosions. Interestingly, one son “had a temper” and struggled in school, feeling socially isolated. Hank had been nerdy and insecure in high school, experiencing himself as unattractive and socially unpopular. He desperately yearned for the pretty girls, and had a secret masturbation practice, which he never discussed with anyone until entering therapy in his forties. Hank matured through college and graduate school (environmental studies), and found that his charm and sense of humor magnetized fellow students, including beautiful women. Not quite believing his attractiveness and worth, he went through a series of relationships, finally marrying a Tiffany who adored him and was happy to build a life with such a wonderful man.

Hank’s life was punctuated by episodic sexual transgressions. He flirted at every opportunity, made risqué comments in business meetings, and occasionally sought out prostitutes. He developed distracting attractions for women in his office and social groups, and maintained semi-delusional ideas about how much they were into him. Because he was a nice guy and didn’t press too hard, his coworkers explained Hank’s irritating behaviors with, “That’s just Hank,” and it didn’t cause particular problems until one of his junior associates (also married) felt a distracting attraction of her own, and they started an affair.

Hank adored his family and always had plenty of satisfying sex with Tiffany. He found his affair exciting but uncomfortable, and came to me for his “anxiety.” As we explored the whole train wreck—coworkers, lies, prostitutes, betrayal of family—Hank

looked down at the floor and fell silent for a few seconds. “What are you feeling at this moment?” I asked. “I’m so ashamed,” Hank replied, his eyes brimming with tears.” I looked at him, feeling love and compassion, and said, “That’s great.”

Shame is a moral foundation.

I knew Hank’s shame was central to resolving the mess he’d gotten himself into with unresolved sexual conflicts, habitual lying and hiding, and distorted relationships with women in general. His shame was his nervous system telling him he was violating his *own moral code*, hardwired into his brain/body. Hank’s moral sense—like all mammals—constantly monitored him and others, evaluating everybody’s actions with his values. His nervous system generated approval feelings at what felt consistent with his rules/values, and shame feelings at what felt inconsistent. The shame family of emotions includes guilt, embarrassment, mortification, regret, and chagrin.

Hank disapproved of his affair, and the burden of the resultant shame drove him to my office. He didn’t know it, but alleviating his moral suffering would require extensive personal and relational work. To his credit, in the next two years of therapy he made the necessary transformations to heal his work, marriage, family, social, and interior relationships.

Hank could have continued his self-destructive lifestyle, gotten better at lying, cheating, and ignoring his shame, and cycle down into chaos, madness, and loss of his marriage with more and more outrageous sexual acting out, but he was too good a man to do that. Instead, he bit the bullet and took on the work. He explored his shame and reached for growth. Today, Hank is happily married, his children are grown and doing well, his wife knows his past and has forgiven his mistakes, and he refuses to surrender to impulses to act out sexually or lie by commission or omission. This growth was a direct consequence of his shame at violating his own moral code.

Shame is a gift, but can be an expensive and dangerous one.

Reason #61: Nervous systems generate shame emotions in response to affairs. *This is a reflex, not a decision. If you have the value of fidelity, your brain/body system will deliver painful shame emotions not matter how powerful and persuasive your loopholes may be.*

Plato, neuroscience, and the beautiful, true, and good.

Our brains are always scanning the environment and noticing what is attractive/unattractive, consistent or not consistent with observable reality, and right or wrong according to our social values. We don't necessarily expect to share what is attractive/unattractive with other people. You might think a painting is beautiful and I might think it's ugly. We do believe we share observable reality with others—like the sky is blue and ice is cold. If we don't agree, we can check with our senses to find common understanding. We also *believe* we share right and wrong feelings and evaluations with others. I don't think it's right to rob banks, and I assume you agree.

Plato called these three standards the beautiful, true, and good, and modern science has discovered neurobiological mechanisms supporting each of them. Hard-wired, dynamic, constantly evolving, neurological systems create constant *emotional* discernments of what is attractive, real, and moral. We first know what is beautiful or ugly, true or untrue, moral or immoral by what we *feel*.

The “good” validity standard is particularly evident in social relationships, and this is not surprising because our moral sense is *social*—it is felt as “we.” What is right or wrong mostly involves values we believe we share with liked-minded “good” others. Generally we do share values, *but not always*, which causes much human conflict and confusion.

For instance, I think it's wrong to litter, and believe I share that value with you and most others. I can still remember a woman in 1979, walking by my office building drinking a coke through a straw from a plastic container. Right in front of me, she finished

her coke, looked around, and with a defiant toss of her ponytail, deposited her empty container in the planter in front of our entranceway. Apparently it felt moral to her to litter in this fashion. I was struck dumb with self-righteous moral condemnation and immediately began creating ugly stories about her.

Why do we care what is good or bad, right or wrong? Why does it matter to most of us whether we are objects of social approval and disapproval? I'm sure you've heard people say—or said yourself—something like, “I don't care (give a #%!) what other people think.”

I hope those people were lying to you—or if it was you saying, “I don't give a #%!,” that you were lying to yourself. Mostly, sociopaths don't care. Sociopaths see others as objects to be used (think con men and corrupt corporate executives). What are worse are psychopaths, who not only don't care, but also consciously feed off the suffering of others (think Charley Manson and Jeffrey Dahmer). We all care whether we are perceived as good or bad by others. This is a foundation of all human cultures.

Reason #62: Cheating involves progressively blocking out caring about who gets harmed. Each lie, betrayal, and rationalization makes you better and smoother at hurting your spouse and children, your lover's spouse and children, and others. Most of us don't want to get better at not caring about hurting people we love.

Humans are social animals constantly evaluating right and wrong, even when we are alone *and the only person watching is me*. Hank felt guilty—a shame emotion—often when he was by himself, using his human capacity to exist simultaneously in the past/present/future to remember past betrayals and anticipate future ones. This guilt constituted internal pressure to grow on his moral line of development—pressure to abide by his values or refine his values.

Infants go through complex developmental stages in intimate connection with mother and other caregivers where they continually grow on different *lines of development* like physical

growth, intellectual growth, and interpersonal growth. What characterizes a line of development is that we grow in one direction through stages, and we don't skip stages. We're born physically tiny and grow larger. We're born with no conscious awareness or abilities to manipulate images, symbols and concepts, and grow to be able to do these things.

One central line of development is the moral line which causes us to feel alarm/shame emotions when doing wrong (or remembering and/or considering doing wrong), and relaxed/peace/proud/pleasure emotions when doing right.

Since the part of us that warns us to not have secret affairs, to somehow solve the problem when we're having a secret affair, or to condemn others for secret affairs, is primarily our moral self, it makes sense to explore exactly how our moral self develops, how it manifests in our lives, how it changes and matures over time, and what to do when we find ourselves—or somebody else discovers us—violating standards. If you've ever been caught cheating by your lover, or have caught your lover cheating, the deer-in-the-headlights, shame/humiliation/rage shock that shows up for one or both of you is part of the energetic interplay of two intertwined moral systems dealing with major transgression/betrayal.

Reason #63: Affairs stunt moral development. *Violating our own moral code by cheating—and then rationalizing it with loopholes— influences us to avoid self-reflection and stunt growth on our moral line of development. We resist looking too closely at moral violations, because our “good” validity standards amplify shame emotions and put pressure on us to follow rules or refine them to be more mature and caring. Following rules meaning losing our lover. Refining our values means accepting we've screwed up, making amends, and closing loopholes. These responses—though “good”— are initially painful and humiliating.*

Like many human tales, the “how we develop and deal with moral standards” story begins with our evolutionary history, progresses to in-utero experience, grows through stages in

childhood and adolescence, and increasingly becomes a function of conscious decision-making in adulthood. In many ways, morality is the story of *shame*, which is interwoven into the childrearing, social structures, myths, and legends of all cultures.

Thank God for limbic areas.

I have a transgender client who loves paleontology. He always dresses as a woman, complete with corsets and prosthetic breasts, and is a unique combination of masculine and feminine. His feminine side shines out in carefully thought out outfits, perfect hair, five-inch heels, impeccable grooming and nails, distaste for violence and vulgarity, and generally a pleasing feminine appearance. His masculine side is revealed in his obsessive attention to proper language usage (he's fluent in English, Italian, French, German, and Spanish), his dedication to paleontology, especially the work of Dr. Bakker whose writings informed Steven Spielberg in the Jurassic Park movies, and his academic distain for what he believes are wrongheaded interpretations of fossil history. He gets furious when people refer to dinosaurs as "reptiles." "They are protoavians!" He explodes. "Can't people see that they were more birds than anything else? Isn't it obvious that they were warm blooded and *social*?"

Well, I agree. Birds have regions in their brains that are analogous to limbic areas in the midbrains of mammals, which empowers birds to "flock together," care for their young, and often attend to their kin. A raven will sit next to a sick member of the flock, just to give him company. Try getting a rattlesnake to do that.

***Raven sidebar:** I was hiking in the hills around my house in January of 2010 when I heard a cacophony of crows. Looking ahead, I saw a flock wheeling and circling a spot on the hill while calling out incessantly. Curious, I walked over to find out what the ruckus was about, and discovered a weird and absorbing tableau. A crow had been recently attacked by some animal, and was lying on a sloping driving with no head, bright red blood streaming*

down onto the pavement. The flock, trying to help their dead fellow, had apparently creating such a disturbance that the predator—probably a cat—had been frightened away from its prey.

Mammals are completely, endlessly, social. They have mirror neurons in their brains, which automatically fire in ways that interiorly mimic one another's feelings and behaviors. So far, the mirror neurons we've found have been *motor neurons* associated with actions, but I suspect others involved in feelings, thoughts, words, concepts, and memories will eventually be discovered.

Human mirror neuron circuits enable us to empathetically “mind-read” when we see or hear another by recapitulating that other's sounds, expressions, and behaviors in our own brain and body. This resonant process gives us a sense of other's states of mind including intentionality. You speak to me and mirror neurons cause my vocal cords to sub-vocalize your words as you utter them. You look at me and mirror neurons “read” your emotional/intentional state from your face, eyes, body, gestures, and voice, and fire sympathetically so I *feel* your apparent emotions and intent.

Reason #64: Your spouse and your children will read your guilt through mirror neuron circuits. Since humans always create meaning out of experience—generate stories or narratives explaining the world—this will distress them and cause them to draw negative conclusions about you and/or themselves. Intimate dialogue and mutual growth can change stories for the better. Stories trapped by lies, taboos about what can be talked about, individual shame, or fear, can fester and become despairing or cynical narratives of self and world.

Mammals have extensive limbic areas—roughly the midbrain between the cerebral cortex and the brain stem—heavily involved in motivation, emotion, learning, and *relationships*. When protomammals showed up 250 million years ago with these limbic areas, they had the advantages of caring about pack/family/group members, and *abilities to pass on social learning*.

Certain mammals like humans, great apes, humpback whales, sperm whales, orcas, bottlenose dolphins, and elephants have especially big brains and long developmental periods for their young, giving them extended social learning from infancy through juvenile and adult development. All these species share special, extra large, neurons called “von Economo neurons,” linking the frontal cortex and limbic areas of their brains. Von Economo neurons (named after Baron Von Economo who discovered them in the nineteenth century) seem to be associated with especially rich, complex social structures.

***Social structure sidebar:** Ivory-hunting poachers in Kenya killed a number of mothers of young elephants, leaving juvenile elephants without access to maternal socialization. As juveniles, these males banded together into particularly violent and destructive “gangs,” much as inner city boys with absent parents form into street gangs. Bringing new mothers to these now physically mature but socially wounded elephants was impossible—they had passed the critical period of receiving maternal social learning—so biologists introduced older bull elephants into the groups, which partially toned down the violence and destruction.*

When young mammals reach the age of human toddlers (around one year for humans, days or weeks for most other mammals) their brains mature to the point that they respond to a caregiver’s non-verbal signal of disapproval with a shame emotion, and seek behaviors to evoke approval signals. When we feel approved of, our sympathetic nervous system activates active dopamine-driven pleasure emotions—and social learning takes place. When we feel disapproved of, our parasympathetic nervous system activates immobilizing shame emotions. Shame emotions involve losing energy—often immobilization/feeling bad—and social learning takes place.

Shame and social learning.

The capacity for social learning is awesome. It means a parent can acquire special knowledge of the world and pass it on through

modeling and judicious use of approval and disapproval, thus hugely enhancing offspring's survival chances. A wolf cub wanders away from the den and mother growls, nips, and pushes him back to the group. It's not fear of the mother, or the pain of the nip that causes that cub to be less likely to wander off in the future. It's rather the painful shame emotion the cub feels in response to the mother's non-verbal expression of disapproval. As the mother nuzzles the cub back into the den, he feels the warmth and pleasure of her approval, and his nervous system returns to the happy sympathetic arousal that characterizes young mammalian development.

Reason #65: Parental cheating normalizes cheating for children and injures their emergent value systems. *Children absorb family values through their nervous systems. The forms this absorption takes are as varied as human consciousness. Some kids grow up to normalize cheating on their lovers. Others end up normalizing being cheated on. Still others become rigid moralists who have no patience for anyone violating standards and little compassion for people struggling with personal transgressions. No parent wants to pass on values that compromise healthy development and joyful relationships.*

Humans start feeling shame around ten to twelve months old in response to parents using disapproving tones and gestures and saying things like, "No!" The average eleven to seventeen months old child hears some version of "No!" once every nine minutes.

"No!" sidebar:

Different writers and researchers interpret "no" every nine minutes in radically different ways. To me, this is a fascinating window into how moral bias unconsciously infuses "objective" work. Consider the following:

- *The psychoanalytic literature views the ten-to-seventeen month time as the "practicing period," where a child plunges into the physical world and interactive relationships, learning necessary boundaries and skills to survive. This*

interval marks the transition from the “primary narcissism” of the ten month old who can do no wrong and the world is his oyster, to conflicts and rapprochement with mother as the two-year-old is regularly frustrated by the mounting prohibitions and limitations of childhood.

- *Developmental neurobiologists like Alan Schore sees the “no” every nine minutes as the child’s nervous system—especially the right hemisphere—learning self regulation in relationship with mother—a function of the dance of their nervous systems coregulating in behavior-prohibition-distress-repair cycles. This coregulation eventually leads to the child developing an inner observing capacity—a system of reflexive critical judgment neural circuits directed at self—to take the role of shame inducing prohibition. These systems are now part of “self,” “ego,” or “I.” Eventually “I” am driven **by me** to comply with societal rules and taboos, even when I’m alone.*
- *Some romanticize indigenous, hunter/gatherer, horticultural groups who practice systemic tribal childcare and appear to have fewer explicit prohibitions on children. Idealists and romanticists of such “natural” childrearing are appalled at “no” every nine minutes. Joseph Chilton Pearce, author of “Magical Child” and “The Biology of Transcendence,” sees “acculturation” as an enemy of optimal development—a form of brainwashing that coerces children away from innocent exploration and joyful spontaneous growth, towards forced adaptation to the “violence” of social and religious conformity. Jean Liedhoff, author of “The Continuum Concept,” is less virulent in her denunciations of western culture, but adamant in her conviction that tribal childrearing, constant in-arms contact for the first six months of life, and communitarian social structures produce happier, less neurotic individuals (there did seem to be very little psychopathology—as defined by the west—in the tribes she studied).*

- *I believe there is validity to these and other interpretations, but I think they miss central evolutionary and developmental truths. Human self-awareness—fully arriving as it probably did only two hundred thousand years ago with two critical mutations on the FOXP2 gene (more on that later)—means that the mammalian capacity for social learning through shame has to be integrated with a consciousness that lives simultaneously in the past/present/future, creates infinite interior and interpersonal perspectives through symbolic communication, and can fantasize almost anything. Further, humans grow through progressive worldviews—egocentric toddlers, family centric children, ethnocentric grade/middle schoolers, and world centric college students. Each worldview processes values, self-awareness, and shame differently, with progressive worldviews building moral discernments/behavior on the foundations of previous learning. Human nervous systems instinctively react to shame dynamics by programming defensive states to avoid them, creating elaborate social networks and customs along the way, which collectively rigidify into cultural standards. Individually, our nervous systems also generate loopholes for violating standards in service of our impulses, needs, drives, feelings, and yearnings. We can harness our hard-wired defensive forces in service of growth through self-awareness and conscious evolution. Over time, this can turn shame programming into a fine tuned moral compass and spiritual guide. In the meantime, every human has the developmental burden of defenses programmed automatically through normal growth—defenses which can't be consciously self-regulated adequately until brains at least reach the maturity of teenage years.*

Let's go back in time and look at Hank as a fourteen-month-old toddler. On a family visit to Uncle Henry and Aunt Emily's house, little Hank wanders too close to Aunt Emily's collection of glass dolls. Mother says, "Hank, you stop right now!" and he feels

shame and freezes. Hank's parasympathetic nervous system—the “brakes” of the nervous system which slow us down—is activated and he stops short. The muscles of his face, neck, and back go limp, his head droops, and his face blushes. He feels a hot distress and starts to cry. Mom picks him up, says in a soothing voice, “Those are too delicate to play with,” and looks at him with love and acceptance. In twenty seconds Hank is playing happily again, slightly less likely to zero in on Aunt Emily's glass doll collection. Social learning has taken place. Even though Hank only understands a half dozen words, elaborate communication—and *social learning*—has occurred via empathy, interpersonal attunement, and approval/disapproval.

But humans are not just animals, we are self-aware beings who can communicate on multiple levels in the past/present/future and symbolically represent and share real and imagined worlds. When Hank grows to 18 to 24 months, his brain matures to the point he can engage in symbolic communication and grammar. He starts being aware of himself and others as separate thinking beings—developmentalists call this a “theory of mind,”—and the world expands in all directions.

This expansion is intoxicating and terrifying, reflected in two-to-four-year-old ecstatic delights, screaming rages, and blind terrors. Welcome to the roller coaster of self-awareness. Now Hank can monitor himself and notice when he's following or violating rules. When violating rules he feels shame emotions (including guilt, embarrassment, chagrin, humiliation) and is motivated to relieve the emotional discomfort by being “good,” finding forgiveness from caregivers, or avoiding the painful affect with defensive maneuvers like denial, suppression, repression, compartmentalization, projection, and all the other psychological defenses that we used to think were primarily driven by anxiety.

This neurobiological drive to be “good” is why human societies can exist. It is why you stop at the stoplight even when nobody else is in the intersection. It's why you don't steal from the store, lie to your friends, cheat your boss, or pollute the planet (or at least think

these things are generally *wrong*). We don't do all this *primarily* because we fear *external* retribution. We follow rules/laws/customs primarily because we're ashamed if we don't.

Reason #66: The guilt and shame of cheating alienates us from family and culture, no matter how elaborate our loopholes are. In general, social separation hurts. This is why shunning is a powerful deterrent in Amish culture, and solitary confinement is considered cruel and unusual punishment by many prison wardens.

The FOXP2 miracle gift of grammar, symbolic communication, self-awareness, and turbocharged shame in the past/present/future.

Two hundred thousand years ago on the plains of Africa, a homo sapiens was born with stable mutations on two of 715 sites of their FOXP2 gene—let's call her Eve. At this time, humans were particularly effective and sophisticated hunter-gatherers, with rudimentary language skills and relatively stable social structures. Think super-chimps.

Eve was different. Her FOXP2 mutation gave her the abilities to think more easily in terms of “I,” “you,” “we,” and “it.” She could consider herself and others in the past, present, and future in ways others couldn't. She could think symbolically, and communicate such insights as in, “That tree looks like an old, bent over man.” These communication abilities with others were mirrored in similar capacities to communicate within herself. Her nervous system was more able to self-reflect—to observe her own thoughts and actions, and to describe these experiences to herself.

“I,” “you,” “we,” and “it,” in the past/present/future, with symbolic capacities yielded potentially *infinite perspectives* *interpersonally* with others and *intrapersonally* within herself. Out of these infinite perspectives arose a sense of “me” that the world hadn't seen before—a deeper, wiser self who now had the neural architecture to progress from animal consciousness as an infant, to symbolic communication, to imagining and constructing tools and

art, to adult abilities to identify with everything, and to time travel from before the Big Bang to the end of time.

I suspect Eve kept her gift pretty much to herself. First, the structures that support neurologic capabilities—the actual neural circuitry—usually show up before they are fully potentiated by individuals. Evolution involves growing into new capacities as well as harnessing old capacities for new purposes. Eve had a different developmental experience than her peers, but also had no one to initiate her into the new thinking/reasoning/relating capacities her brain had. Further, it's dangerous to be strange. If one individual is too different from a group, the group will often attack them. Carl Jung called this “inflation” from the collective, and warned that it was a real hazard for innovators, creators, and pioneers in every human realm.

***Jung sidebar:** The danger of culture attacking “inflated” individuals—those deemed dangerously different from the collective—was one of his main rationales for not being too publicly involved with Alcoholic Anonymous, even though the central AA idea of needing a spiritual awakening came from his work as reflected in correspondence he had with Bill Wilson. Jung feared professional censure if he came out too strongly for spiritual awakening as a central tenet of recovery from addiction.*

Even though not fully potentiated, Eve's unique powers almost certainly gave her survival advantages socially and environmentally. She could imagine potential threats, and connect them with past and future threats. She could see analogies and metaphors. She could offer seemingly miraculous predictions and suggestions to the rest of the tribe.

We know the FOXP2 mutation is a crucial upleveling of the human race, because *every human has it*. One family in England has been discovered with only one of the two sites (of the 715) having the mutation, and family members are intellectually challenged and struggle with language. The FOXP2 mutation was the birth of human self-awareness—an evolutionary rocket.

When 18-to-24 month old Hank encounters grammar and symbolic communication, initiated and guided by family and tribe, he encounters an infinity of interior and interpersonal perspectives, and it blows his little mind. His linear, linguistic, logical, left hemisphere kicks into high gear at two-years-old. Till now, his neural development has been mostly in his non-verbal, emotional, non-linear, body-based right hemisphere. At two, Hank starts asking, “Why?” to just about everything.

Reason #67: Nobody wants to look into the eyes of their son or daughter and have to answer the question, “Why did you cheat?”

Everything expands at the two-years-old developmental fulcrum, including shame dynamics. Up to now, shame has been cued largely by *external* disapprovals from mom and others. Now, starting around two and extending throughout life, Hank is constantly in relationship with *himself*, approving or disapproving of behaviors, thoughts, feelings, impulses, and fantasies. His brain has standards programmed into elaborate neural circuits, and scans the environment—including Hank—and disapproving of him if he violates rules. Disapproval cues shame emotions, which need to be regulated somehow—remember, parasympathetic collapse feels dangerous to our nervous systems. Two-year-old Hank seeks relief in forgiveness or approval from caregivers—or to defensive avoidance.

An example of shame regulated with forgiveness and approval is loving Mom picking up Hank at Aunt Emily’s with soothing touch and tone—*external* emotional regulation.

Hank’s brain instinctively avoids shame emotion with *internal emotional regulation* —defensive avoidance reflexes—that use whatever neurocognitive capacities he has at the time. In toddlers and little kids these capacities include dissociation, denial, repression, suppression, compartmentalization, scapegoating, and all the other defense mechanisms that Freud thought were driven primarily by anxiety, but in addition push against shame emotions.

Young minds can't rationally process shame emotions because young children are not rational. It takes formal operational cognition to consider that disapproval leads to defensive reflexes, which we instinctively avoid. Formal operational thought shows up in early adolescence. Try explaining competing concepts to a three-year-old, and you're going to have one confused little kid.

Defensive states:

When a friend suddenly says something cruel, and you freeze in distress. When your lover seems to deliberately misunderstand you. When you are so sick of your child's irritating whine, you scream, "Shut Up!" you are in a defensive state of diminished capacity. These begin at conception, and grow as necessary aspects of our psychological/behavioral immune systems—our genetically driven, social/biological self-defense.

Defensive distortions—unchallenged or regulated—grow and elaborate, supported by increasing abilities to think and relate, and *unconsciously* informed by expanding worldviews.

The "unconscious" part of this is a big deal. There are two forms of memory, *implicit memory* and *explicit memory*. *Implicit memories* involve our nervous systems responding to internal and external stimuli by encoding emotional reactions, supporting beliefs, and impulses to act. Implicit memories don't require conscious attention, and start being encoded at least in the third trimester. Many think the blissful floating sensations of meditation involve implicit memories of being in the womb. When an implicit memory is cued, we have emotional reactions, supporting beliefs, and impulses to act, *with no sense of something being remembered*.

Explicit memories begin being encoded at around eighteen months when our hippocampus matures, and require focused attention. They also involve emotional memories, body memories, characteristic perspectives, and impulses to act, but they *feel like something is being remembered*. What did you have for breakfast? If you remember oatmeal, there is a sense of something being remembered.

Defensive states begin as nervous systems encode protective implicit memories, and continue to deepen and expand as we grow. Confront two-year-old Timmy with, “It’s wrong to hit your sister,” and he might have a conditioned defense of denial, as in, “I didn’t hit her.”

Like parasites feeding off the body of a host, defenses build toxic systems that require conscious intervention. With small children, the conscious interventions come mostly *externally* from parents and caregivers. Timmy’s mom says, “You did hit her, and it is against the rules.” As we develop more robust powers of thought, self-reflection, and self-regulation, conscious interventions come more *internally* from ourselves. Mom might contain Timmy’s subsequent temper tantrum—another implicitly programmed defense against the shame of Mom’s disapproval—by gently but firmly constraining him until he can be soothed, distracted, or instructed—external regulation. Fourteen-year-old Timmy going into a rage at her sister for borrowing and breaking his iPod is more able to get a hold of himself and have a more civil conversation—internal self-regulation. Unlike parasites, defenses can be transformed into empowerment, enlivenment, and spiritual guides through compassionate self-awareness and growth mindsets.

Defenses strengthen when hidden, denied, or defended. Cued by perceived threat, protective implicit patterns—implicit memories—automatically constellate into defensive states characterized by:

- *Amplified or numbed emotions.*
- *Distorted perspectives.*
- *Destructive impulses.*
- *Diminished capacities for empathy and self-reflection.*

Defenses are painful and dangerous, but not necessarily harmful. Defenses serve our immature fears and desires, but also help us be “good”—true to what we currently believe is the social

compact. With courageous inquiry and action, defenses can mature and resolve into scaffoldings supporting deeper spirituality, more generous gifts, and tantric intimacy. We can grow to notice personal violations of our “good” standard, our defensive impulses and beliefs that arise, and reach to make caring and compassionate adjustments. Awakening consciousness and self-regulation proceed in stages as do all forms of development, and clients often enter therapy struggling with a current stage of defensive self-regulation and unconsciously yearning to uplevel.

Let’s fast forward Hank’s defense states to adulthood:

- He is talking himself through a loophole in his “be faithful,” value.
- He’s rationalizing, avoiding the unfolding nightmare as his life unravels.
- He’s suppressing, struggling to “not think about it.”
- He’s projecting, blaming his wife, his upbringing, his stress, or “society,” for his rule-violation.
- He’s dissociating, completely forgetting about his affair when hanging out with his family.

Hank came to me for his *anxiety*, anxious about all the things he was ashamed of, but not quite ready to change, not quite able to discern between healthy responses to the present moment and defensive patterns.

When feeling shame emotions, Hank’s nervous system activated defensive habits whose neural substrates were laid down in infancy, and then strengthened/developed as Hank matured — strengthened/developed *not* in good ways as in progressively understanding his tendencies to talk himself into doing “wrong,” but in bad ways as in further justifying his impulses to cheat.

Defenses can keep getting more complex and deeply wired until we recognize them for what they are and *take conscious responsibility for our own moral development*. We can *consciously* feel the shame emotions associated with violating personal/social

standards, examine them with understanding that we are being influenced by implicit memories distorting our emotions/beliefs/impulses, reach for mature/compassionate understanding. Such understanding leads us to either comply with values, or refine them into more mature, caring, and wise values.

This is the gift of shame, which comes to us with self-awareness and a developing mind. Shame involves vast capacities for suffering, but also maintains the fabric of society and gives us opportunities to grow more self-aware, caring, and spiritually awakened.

For example, after years of therapy, Hank developed the wisdom and courage to inform his wife Tiffany of his indiscretions and struggles to grow. She was initially furious and overwhelmed. “I can believe you hid all this from me!” she screamed at him in an initial session. “What were you thinking?”

To his credit, Hank responded as honestly as he could, explaining, “Not much. Mostly I just did what I felt like and tried to avoid thinking about it. I know now that I don’t want to lie and cheat anymore. I love you and want us to be better.” He and Tiffany eventually found their way back to love and trust, but it was a hard and stony road.

All the above capacities came into being with the FOXP2 mutation two hundred thousand years ago. To put the enormity of the FOXP2 mutation into perspective, self-awareness and grammar/symbolic expression organize a communication matrix that extends infinitely. Human communication capacities accelerated evolution by orders of magnitude.

Let’s take a little excursion into the realm of language.

The Universe as language: all creation as cosmic conversation.

Terence McKenna, psychedelic researcher, philosopher, and hilarious speaker, said in a 1990 lecture that there were two views of the universe—the scientific view which says the universe is

“stuff,” and the emergent holistic view which says the universe is “language.” Twenty years later, I’m pretty much convinced that both views are accurate. The universe is comprised of stuff communicating with other stuff starting sub-atomically and ascending in an include-and-transcend fashion infinitely. Each new level includes all previous levels and adds something novel, reflecting what Ken Wilber calls a holarchy—as in an ascending series of “wholes.”

Communication means information exchange involving mutual influence. Teilhard de Chardin, the famous Jesuit priest/paleontologist, considered information exchange involving mutual influence to constitute “consciousness,” meaning that the universe *is* consciousness, and human beings are particularly dense clouds of consciousness with the incredible ability to direct their focus and attention inwardly and outwardly at will. Since such focus and attention creates information exchange involving mutual influence, we can *consciously* direct, accelerate, and shape our individual and collective evolution.

“Communication” starts subatomically, where tiny black holes—protons are probably infinitesimal black holes—communicate with energetically charged vacuum to self-organize toward greater coherence (see physics sidebar). Briefly, Chaos Theory has demonstrated that any open, hierarchical system of differentiated parts that is capable of chaotic behavior (like the human brain, human societies, ecosystems, or a galaxy) has a self-organizing tendency towards greater complexity, which appears as greater coherence, simplicity, and energy efficiency. Self-organization towards greater coherence continues from subatomic particles, through elements, compounds, solar systems, life, mammals, and self-aware you and me.

In human development, babies communicate *with others and themselves* first biochemically/energetically (the womb), then include behavior/sound/touch/taste/sight/sensation/emotion (after birth), then include images and words (around one year old), then include concepts (around two), then include self-as-center-of-a-

life-story (around five), then include self-as-part-of-cultural-groups (five-to-eleven), then include self-as-part-of-humanity (twelve-onward, if we're initiated into worldcentric perspectives), then include self-as-part-of-spirit-unfolding (happens if we keep growing).

Self-aware beings can conceptualize, *and participate in*, communication at any of these levels, and *at each developmental level* from birth to death generate countless states that *reflexively and automatically* intersubjectively harmonize with self and others in communication. Baby and Mom holding and cooing. Two-year-old asking, "Why?" Six-year-old asking, "How many/much/far?" Sixteen-year-old asking, "What is the meaning of life?" Each of these involves multiple layers of attuned communication. We don't have to try to do it. Communication just happens and we either support or interfere with the process. Excited, enervated, defensive, joyful, grateful, enraged, graceful, light, dark, verbal, nonverbal...there are endless states and processes that blend together in communication like iron filings influenced by two magnets simultaneously.

Carlos Castaneda in *The Teachings of Don Juan*, called any current set of perspectives an "assemblage point," to emphasize how we both automatically and consciously choose worldviews. Our brain automatically orients our moment-to-moment worldview (our brains are always creating meaning while anticipating and associating), but our consciousness—through the magic of focus and intention—can change channels.

For example, I wake depressed, look out my window at a sunny day in Santa Barbara, and quote to myself a young alcoholic who worked with me in the late seventies, "Another shitty day in paradise." I hear/feel/perceive my depressed perspective, realize it is some implicit defensive association, and cultivate gratitude for my body, family, house, and profession. As the gratitude infuses my body/mind system, the world starts looking like a more beautiful, friendly, and hopeful place. I have consciously changed channels. I have consciously created a new assemblage point.

Self-aware you and me can communicate with others *and ourselves* in the past/present/future *in multiple interconnected ways* and we naturally self-organize this communication towards greater coherence. Remember, all communication in the universe—Terence McKenna says communication *is* the universe—self-organizes towards greater coherence. “Greater coherence” in humans generally means toward deeper consciousness, more compassion; increasing love, and yearning to better serve our own inner voices, the people we care for, the human race, the ecosystems of Earth, and Pure Spirit. More prosaically in the above I-woke-up-depressed example, greater coherence is the movement from, “Another shitty day in paradise,” to “I’m lucky to be alive and connected to others I love in this beautiful world.”

Within the matrix of these multiple levels, human communication begins when sperm meets egg (talk about your mutual influence!) and then proceeds biochemically and energetically through gestation.

At birth, mother and infant communicate body-to-body, brain-to-brain (especially right hemisphere to right hemisphere the first two years), and person-to-person, to help guide baby’s physical, neural, and social development. A newborn has a full complement of a hundred billion neurons, *but only 17% of them are hooked up into neural networks*. It is through interaction with the environment that baby-brain software and hardware is developed, and it is not just baby’s software/hardware developing. Being parents influences Mom’s and Dad’s development. For instance, a father’s testosterone (competitive, aggressive hormone) goes down, and oxytocin/vasopressin (cooperative, bonding hormones) go up before and after the birth of his baby, and even when smelling any infant’s receiving blankets. Non-fathers hold babies equally on the right and left sides. 80% of fathers hold babies on the left, unconsciously supporting right hemisphere to right hemisphere communication and soothing—the right hemisphere that dominates the first two years of baby’s neural growth.

Infants who are well attuned to and whose nervous systems are not extraordinarily emotionally reactive, feel known, accepted, and protected throughout development and tend to have what are called “secure attachment styles.” They feel secure in the world, confident that competent caregivers will help when needed, and—since their nervous systems don’t have to defensively shut down much in response to abuse or neglect—have relatively low capacities for dissociation, the neural capacity that underlies most psychological defenses. They still can and do dissociate, but not to extremes, and later in life will have more abilities to be aware when they enter defensive altered states.

Infants who are not well attuned to, who have high emotional reactivity, or who have parents emotionally preoccupied, dismissive, or unresolved/chaotic, have to *self-regulate* when they’re alarmed. Infant nervous systems *automatically* do this by first protesting (crying, screaming, throwing up) and then collapsing and dissociating (spacing out and disconnecting from their bodies). These maneuvers create neural networks which deepen with each repetition. Over time these networks become the neural substrates of defensive reactions, which resist conscious awareness in more mature individuals.

When babies start feeling shame in response to *other’s* disapproval at one-year-old, and in response to *their own* disapproval of themselves as they approach two, their capacities for dissociation are included and transcended into defenses designed to avoid the painful and dangerous shame emotions. Defensive habits pull us away from shame emotions often before we’ve even aware of the shame emotions. If you vehemently attack me, I might only *consciously* be aware of rage, self-righteous indignation, or frustration, while—neurologically—all these were cued by my immediate shame response at your criticism—shame that my nervous system immediately regulated into more activating emotions like anger and frustration.

Thus, when we engage in the social interaction parts of any assemblage point, there are defensive forces—neural networks

automatically cued by perceived threat of disapproval/shame—that work against self-awareness and honest interior and interpersonal communication. In the multileveled matrix of communication, the disapproval/approval, shame, defensive layers interfere with clear thought and right action. This is one explanation for why defensive states involve amplified or numbed emotions, distorted perspectives, destructive impulses, and diminished capacities for empathy and self-reflection. All these characteristics are organized to avoid clearly considering the potentially shameful reality of our current experience, and avoid taking personal responsibility for distressing situations.

Physics sidebar.

Most physicists agree that about 13.75 billion years ago the universe was the size of a subatomic particle and suddenly exploded into what we now see all around us. Though there is general consensus about the Big Bang, cosmologists have quite a divergence of opinions as to what the universe is and what it's currently doing.

Modern quantum theorists believe atoms formed from primal protons and neutrons held together through subatomic particles and two mysterious forces called “The Strong Force,” and “The Weak Force.” They further believe the universe is expanding via effects of another mysterious entity called, “Dark Matter,” which hasn't yet been found and comprises 98% of everything.

Nassim Haramein, a self-taught physicist who just now is experiencing mainstream acceptance via papers published in reputable scientific journals, believes protons are tiny black holes, or singularities, spinning at almost the speed of light in immensely energetically charged vacuum. Gravity from these tiny black holes holds protons together to create atoms, and interaction between the energetically charged vacuum and the black holes self-organizes our universe via feedback loops that bias greater coherence over greater chaos.

Haramain further believes our universe is a double taurus of revolving energies with a humongous black hole at the center, and contained inside a larger black hole. He thinks the apparent expansion astronomers see is a function of huge energy currents that shape the double taurus form; a form which repeats itself in galaxies, stars, planets, compounds, atoms, and subatomic particles, all resonantly connected through harmonic octaves of energy levels—and different size black holes—predictably from the infinitely huge to the infinitely small.

Whew!

Strangely, two weeks after my friends Ric and Patricia introduced me to Haramain's articles and videos, he came to Santa Barbara to lecture about his work. On Wednesday night, October 21, I found myself uncharacteristically driving through the chilly night to the Ayni Gallery near the harbor to meet my wife Becky, our son Ethan, and my niece Leilani for the talk. I was exhausted after conducting eight therapy sessions from 9:00 to 6:00—the reason it's unusual for me to go out on a work night—and walked in 20 minutes late, but luckily found a great seat in the front row.

Nassim is a beautiful, articulate man who was raised by his Iranian psychiatrist father and Italian mother in Switzerland. He spent much of his early life studying physics and spirituality, while pursuing physical passions like skiing, surfing, and rock climbing. His lectures are peppered with an oddly endearing mix of scientific and popular culture (as in, “Dude, what did you do with my strong force?”). Much like Einstein who struggled with mainstream academia in his early career, Nassim as a self-taught physicist has long battled with entrenched institutions for recognition. This recently changed somewhat when his paper, “The Schwarzschild Proton” received the “Best Paper Award” at the University of Liege, Belgium, during the recent CASYS'09 (Computing Anticipatory Systems) conference. That October night he spoke for four hours about his theories, experiments, and cosmological beliefs.

During the talk, Nassim gradually expanded his perspectives in what increasingly appeared to be a unified field theory answering many questions that have been plaguing scientists for a hundred years. He explained why quantum observations haven't jived with quantum theory—and do with his frameworks. He explained how quantum physicists have had to add corrective constants to their field equations to get rid of what they've labeled "nasty infinities,"—I love physicist humor—while such corrections are unnecessary when viewing protons as tiny black holes." His formulations explain why the mass of the universe keeps appearing in various field equations—not because they are "nasty infinities" that need to be corrected out, but because they are legitimate reflections of the vast energies in singularities and charged vacuum at every level of creation.

I felt my fatigue transforming into a kind of rapture.

I asked him if gravitation effects were instantaneous according to his calculations, and he said, "Yes," thus providing an explanation for the translocal phenomena of instantaneous transfer of information that has long been a standard research support for the existence of a quantum field. Similarly, I asked if there were interlocking fields all the way up into the macro, universal level, and all the way down to the subatomic, microcosmic level, extending and connecting through resonance in progressive and regressive octaves of energy levels exchanging information. "Yes," he said smiling, "Fields all the way up and all the way down." I was hearing the details of Einstein's Holy Grail of physics and cosmology which he sought his whole life and never fully realized, a unified field theory.

Einstein thought field theory to be the twentieth century's most important contribution to modern physics, and was frustrated in the second half of his career by his inability to reconcile the existence of a unified field theory with the theoretical formulations of quantum physics. As Nassim said, nobody knew about black holes at the end of the 19th century when quantum mechanics was postulated and then generally accepted, and so scientists

concluded that tiny positively charged protons didn't generate enough gravity to bind together in the nuclei of atoms. They concluded there was a "Strong Force" that held protons and neutrons together, and a "Weak Force" that held atoms together. Nassim calls the process of postulating mysterious entities like the Strong Force, the Weak Force, and Dark Matter, to explain incongruous phenomena like protons bonding together and the universe expanding, doing, "Physics as you go."

Nassim's material blew my mind while leaving me a bit skeptical. His system posits just two energies that organize everything—gravity and electromagnetism (and electromagnetism is a function of gravity so, really, there's just gravity)—which exist in a matrix of black holes and charged vacuum constantly interacting in a series of unified fields, none of which are separate from the others (hence, "Unified Field Theory"). The interaction of charged vacuum and tiny black holes self-organizes everything toward greater coherence, greater complexity, and—when we get into biological systems especially—deeper consciousness and greater compassion.

Wow!

My skepticism was addressed when I actually saw the mathematics that Nassim has developed to support his ideas. There are a variety of findings from physics research—actual observations generated and replicated in labs and particle colliders—that have never fit quantum theory's mathematics. The numbers just keep coming out wrong, no matter how creatively some of the best minds of the twentieth century tweaked them. Applying Hamein's theory yields mathematical proofs that fit this data. The numbers now harmonize—in most cases perfectly—with the data. Each one of us—in all probability—is a nodal point of consciousness in an ever-evolving matrix of black holes and charged vacuum self-organizing towards greater compassion and depth of consciousness.

This whole system is characterized by increasing include-and-transcend levels of communication. When we speak, the words are just one layer of a multilayered communication system that extends infinitely up through universes and down through subatomic particles, with each layer including and transcending previous ones—all connected, all informing one another consciously and unconsciously. Our voice tones are a communication layer, our shared intersubjective energies are another layer, our facial expressions, timing, gestures, and physical touch are other layers. Our personal histories interacting culturally through the emotional medium of memory, conditioning, and communication are further layers. Me writing these words to you—a specific person I’m imagining at this moment—is another layer, and so on and on and on and on...

Reason #68: Cheating disrupts coherence—and thus evolution—with everyone involved.

We all have defenses; it is the human condition.

Getting back to Hank, he developed defenses to avoid feeling small, inadequate, or unloved—especially to avoid the shame emotions associated with these states—by imagining powerful/ attractive men and women thinking he was the greatest. He grew to believe he was entitled to special attention and strokes because he was so delightful—often a sign of narcissistic wounds which often accompany the, “I’m having an affair because I deserve it,” loophole. These defensive tendencies were amplified by an anxious ambivalent attachment style—he could become alternately demanding, needy, and anxious—with a preoccupied and particularly emasculating mother, and progressed through development to the loophole of feeling entitled to cheat on Tiffany. *Luckily*, his values of caring for others and not doing harm were in place enough that he increasingly *felt ashamed* of all the damage he was generating—shame that finally drove him to therapy.

To effectively self-regulate shame emotions, we need to be aware of them while simultaneously examining the rules we’re

violating, and then either following the rules, changing the rules, and/or making amends for transgressions. These *capacities* to hold competing concepts simultaneously don't show up developmentally until *our brains mature in adolescence*. This means that *all of us* hit adolescence with defensive habits hard wired into our nervous systems from many years of automatically trying to avoid emotional pain with the more limited neurological resources available to us in early development.

So, we're not all hopelessly neurotic because we automatically enter defensive states when we feel threatened. Shame is just a signal—a painful one like when we physically hurt ourselves—to self-regulate. When we're neurologically able, we can learn sophisticated, self-aware self-regulation that uses shame to *accelerate* our personal and moral development by helping us observe, follow, and refine values. If we don't develop such capacities, we are destined to regress into automatic implicit-memory-driven avoidance-of-shame-and-distress patterns when threatened. Unchallenged, these defensive patterns resist empathy and self-reflection and *stunt* development.

Babies don't think like little adults.

If you read the psychoanalytic and object relations literature of the twentieth century you will find writer after writer referring to infants “deciding” things, having “sub-personalities” that organize their behavior, or wanting to “control” or “manipulate” parents with various behaviors. Such references have always driven me crazy. An infant brain is *not mature enough* to experience herself as an emotionally separate individual, much less engage in elaborate interpersonal strategies to “Get what I want.”

Caregiver and baby's nervous systems create multiple intersubjective communication links, which guide physical, neurological, and emotional development until baby starts feeling like an emotionally separate being around a year old. At this time a caregiver's approval/disapproval can *additionally* condition a child's nervous systems in reacting to the world through the social

learning dynamics we just discussed. At sixteen months, toddlers can *additionally* hide emotions from caregivers, and, to the extent baby's nervous system has learned to avoid shame, she can conceal it from Mom. At 18 to 24 months children wake-up to conscious self-awareness and start to experience an inner community of selves that can approve or disapprove of one another, and then kids can *additionally* feel more approval/disapproval/shame toward themselves and unconsciously avoid pain using their emergent capacities to control thought/emotion—thus elaborating and strengthening defensive reactions. These defensive reactions *additionally* become deeper and more sophisticated with emergent cognitive abilities through development until *at least* adolescence when a child can *finally* hold competing concepts simultaneously. An adolescent brain has the capacity to think, “I broke a rule, I'm ashamed, but I'm still a good person who can alter the rule, the consequence, and my sense of ‘bad’ self.” These kinds of abilities access and manipulate a number of perspectives, which—if an individual learns to manipulate them simultaneously—can transform defensive programming into emotional/relational/spiritual growth.

The Model Imperative.

Our brains develop through what are called “critical periods” when it is especially easy to learn certain skills and capacities like walking, talking, and thinking rationally. During critical periods, several brain processes accelerate:

- Neurogenesis: dramatically increases in the growth of new neurons and brain circuits in different brain areas.
- Myelination: the process of fatty sheaths around neurons thickening intensifies, making them much more efficient, having the same effects on brains as dramatically increasing computing speed does on computers. Special cells called oligodendrocytes automatically start wrapping myelin around neural circuits that are constellated. The more they are constellated, the more myelin gets wrapped around them. A

myelinated neuron conducts information one hundred times faster than an unmyelinated one.

- Neural pruning: neurons and circuits dying and dissolving accelerates in brain areas that have not been activated by use and attention.

Major critical periods are one-year-old when we begin to walk and respond with shame emotions if disapproved of, five-to-seven when we learn to think concretely and are moved to follow rules of our tribe, eleven-to-fourteen when we can learn to hold competing concepts simultaneously in our consciousness, and fifteen-to-nineteen when we boost movement towards adult identities.

If we don't develop a capacity during the critical period, it is much harder—sometimes impossible—to develop it later. One example of this is how a language learned before four uses different neural architecture than languages we learn after five, *no matter how well we speak the language*. Feral children raised by wolves or wild dogs rarely learn to walk upright and are usually language/intellect challenged throughout life. They had animal models in critical periods when they needed human models.

Joseph Chilton Pearce in *The Biology of Transcendence* notes that most human upleveling—from walking, to language, to learning values—requires more than neurological development and a present, congruent, and marked caregiver. To walk, we need to have a *model* in our environment who walks competently. To talk, we need *models* of talkers in our environment. Many developmental uplevelings require a functional model in relationship with us, and—through some alchemy of transmission, relationship, mirror neurons, and simple instruction—they become models we use to *grow towards*.

Pearce makes the point that, even though teenage brains are expanding, myelinating, and pruning from fifteen to nineteen very much like one-year-old, five-year-old, and eleven-year-old brains, researchers haven't detected the kinds of significant shifts in abilities from fifteen to nineteen that occur in other critical periods.

He concludes these teens have inadequate models to initiate them into the kind of worldcentric, non-violent, compassion-for-all consciousness they've become neurologically capable of.

I agree with Pearce that teens benefit from wise men and women who evoke enough respect and awe that the kids' nervous systems "choose" them as models to grow towards (of course, this is ideal for all education). I also think that many scientists studying the fifteen-to-nineteen critical period miss the forest for the trees. Ask most parents what changes happen between fifteen and nineteen and they'll tell you that a fifteen-year-old generally doesn't have a sense of autonomous adult social existence in the world, and a nineteen-year-old generally does. I believe this shift to an autonomous adult social identity is the major developmental achievement of this critical period.

When I was fifteen I entered therapy with Dr. Joe Ericson in Claremont, California, and continued episodic sessions with him till nineteen. We had no subsequent contact until thirty-one years later when Becky and I had lunch with him. As we talked, Becky and I were blown away by how similar Joe's expressions, voice tones, values, humor, laughter, and references were to my own. Apparently, during that critical fifteen-to-nineteen period, my nervous system had chosen Joe as an adult model, and I had continued to grow toward that model in subsequent decades. This was not conscious. I never deliberately adopted any of his values, mannerisms, or expressions. Joe was simply chosen by my hungry-for-a-model nervous system to guide me into manhood.

I believe we instinctively pick such models throughout life—people our brains register as paragons on different developmental lines. Accomplished athletes, dancers, martial artists, scientists, and artists will often speak of "muses," "mentors," and "guides," who inspired them in mysterious ways. As a therapist, I know I've been a model to some of my clients as Joe was to me, and I continue to encounter models I consciously and unconsciously grow towards. Ken Wilber, David Deida, Bill O'Hanlon, and Patricia Albere have been recent examples. This modeling is

deeper and wider than the normal projections that take place in therapy, where clients imagine their therapists to be an idealized or demonized parent, and the work of therapy becomes discerning reality from the client's—and therapist's—projections. Our nervous systems look for guides who embody progress in significant areas.

The model imperative puts a lot of pressure on parents. If we create a family environment of sufficient warmth, integrity, and openness, our children are likely to receive transmissions that can help them have happy lives—create personal myths of love, health, growth, and transcendence. If we normalize self-destructive behavior, or cannot embody maturity, we risk our kids missing crucial opportunities during critical periods.

Reason #69: We especially don't want our child's nervous system to hardwire models of cheating and lying during a critical period.

I knew I was a role model for Hank during the years we worked together. My conviction that his cheating was wrong and expanding his marriage was a good thing informed our personal/energetic relationship—not because I harangued or witnessed him with my values, but because such compassionate values magnetized him during a critical period. His life story—his personal myth—changed accordingly.

What did this look like? In our sessions, Hank and I would examine a current problem, which would lead us to his accompanying defenses and values. As we looked for deeper truths, the work incrementally fostered moral growth.

Here's one example:

Hank: Fidgeting a little. "I told Margaret [his lover] I'd be at the conference all weekend. I really hope she comes. We could have a lot of fun."

Keith: "How do you feel as you tell me this?"

Hank: Fidgeting a little. "I'm embarrassed to still be setting up times with her."

Keith: "What do you think your embarrassment is telling you?"

Hank: Becoming more animated. “I know it’s wrong. I just want to see her. What’s the harm? We’re going to stop soon. We’ve discussed it. Why not one more weekend together?”

Keith: Looking calmly into his eyes. “Why not?”

Hank: “You’re right. It’s stupid to see her. I should tell her that we need to stop now. This whole relationship is crazy.”

Keith: Laughing. “It’s not just *me* that’s right about that. It’s *you*.”

Many exchanges such as this led to Hank ending his affair and bringing Tiffany into treatment. They took on the consequences of his infidelities and worked towards healing and love. His myth became one of redemption, and hers one of love injured and renewed.

Hank could have kept avoiding his shame—kept digging his miserable hole deeper and deeper until it finally wrecked his family and business. Instead, he chose growth over repetitive defensive enactments.

Listening to our moral sense—encoded, enforced, and experienced through shame emotions—guides us. We choose behaviors which feel “good,” teachers who feel “right,” and identities that feel admirable. When it comes to secret affairs, this is how shame is a gift that keeps giving, one way or another.

Reason #70: Be a mythological hero, not a mythological jerk.
Every myth has good guys and bad guys. What role does cheating give you in your personal myth? Even worse, what role does this give you in your spouse’s and children’s myths? On the other hand, choosing loving integrity and fighting for a fulfilling marriage is heroic. Even better, it eventually feels heroic to you, your spouse, and your family.

CHAPTER SIX: FAMILY: INFLUENCES AND IMPACTS.

Let's be painfully honest. Affairs and divorces are signature traumas that echo through generations. We explored in Chapter Four the fallacy of, "I'm having an affair because I don't want to put the children through a divorce." The misguided individual using this loophole at least understands that divorces are hard on children. One in ten children raised by both parents gets diagnosed with a psychiatric illness, while the figure is one in five in divorced families. Though children are resilient, it is clearly better for them to have parents with a healthy, expanding love.

Divorce sucks, but sometimes it's the best option. Let me give you some advice if you do divorce your spouse (I know I've mentioned it before, but it bears repeating). If you haven't already started an affair, for the kids' sake—if not for your own—at least officially separate from your spouse before you start dating other people.

Reason #71: Affairs can hurt generations. *If your loophole is, "My marriage is over anyway," it's easier on all generations of your family if you at separate before you become sexually involved with others. If you are in an affair, it's easier on your family if you resolve it honorably and compassionately.*

Why is divorce sometimes the best option? There can be many reasons, but four of the most common are abuse, addiction, chronic unhappiness, and a spouse who refuses to work on expanding love:

Never tolerate physical or sexual abuse.

First of all, it is not acceptable for someone who is physically or sexually abusing themselves or their children to keep doing what they're doing. If you are an abuser, get help. If you are married to an abuser, get help *to protect you and the kids*. Whoever has the most clarity and authority in a family—usually the adult victim of abuse or adult witness of abuse—has a moral obligation to themselves and the children to act powerfully and decisively.

Reason #72: If you're having an affair to avoid dealing with physical or sexual abuse, you are enabling an abuser.

Never tolerate addiction.

If your spouse is an alcoholic or drug addict (or sex addict, or gambling addict), or deeply involved in crime, you have difficult choices. You can do nothing or make ineffectual gestures—thus codependently supporting sick behaviors by “voting with your body,” and tolerating addiction. Alternatively, you can set boundaries like, “Enter recovery, get right with the law, or address your chronic self-destructive behaviors, or I separate to protect me and the kids,”—thus taking a concrete stand against addiction madness.

Relationships involving addiction need major intervention—usually from therapy, recovery programs, or sometimes law enforcement. If sustainable progress does not ensue, divorce can become the best option.

Reason #73: If you are addicted to anything, secret affairs tend to support your addiction. Practicing addicts are engaged in transgressive acting out behavior. Affairs are transgressive acting out behaviors, which can be “gateway drugs” to other destructive impulses and habits.

Don't tolerate chronic unhappiness.

If a couple is chronically hostile, distant, or otherwise pervasively miserable, they need to take a stand for love. This often means seeking help to *change* maladaptive beliefs and behaviors, or to separate and move on. If *one parent* does this—seeks help and changes—the message to kids is that at least one of their role models is willing to grow to support love.

As kids of divorce develop through the separate households that usually emerge, one parent's stand for integrity, development, and love gives each child a choice to do the same as he or she matures through adolescence and moves into love relationships of their own.

Don't tolerate your spouse refusing to work on improving love.

Satisfying marital healing takes *two* parents willing and able to do the work. If one can't or won't, the relationship will probably end painfully, or cycle endlessly through toxic patterns. I always wince when a husband or wife complains about an irritating or destructive behavior, and the other responds with some version, "Get used to it. That's the way I am." I've seen a lot of marriages crash on the rocks of "That's just the way I am." We are *always changing and growing*. If my wife wants me to grow towards cleaning up after myself in the kitchen, why not? If your spouse has a legitimate need or yearning, it is tremendously comforting and endearing to him or her if you take it seriously and are willing to change—no matter how slowly and incrementally—towards being more beautiful, good, or true in that particular way. Parents learning how to more passionately love each other provide wonderful, optimal training for children in how to embrace an expanding-love standard for lover relationships.

Reason #74: An affair is a horrible boundary to set for your spouse not being willing to work on your marriage. If your "I won't change" spouse discovers your affair it will become a self-righteous rationale for you being the problem and them never having to examine their participation in conflicts, issues, or general unhappiness.

Family history shapes our nervous systems.

When a new client comes to see me there are signature aspects of their life I want to know. Genetic endowment plus family experience shapes nervous systems. An infant is conceived, and the alchemy of his or her genes and intrauterine experience leads to temperament, how this baby's body, nervous system, and nascent consciousness is primed to meet the world outside the womb. Most babies seem to fall into the category of "easy," "hard," and "shy" and have varying levels of introversion/extroversion, emotional reactivity, dependence, self-directedness, harm avoidance, novelty seeking, cooperativeness, reward dependence, self-transcendence,

masculine/feminine sexual essence, and probably dozens of other factors we haven't yet validated with empirical data. After birth, attachment relationships with mother and others, nutrition, personal experience, and cultural practices/beliefs/standards add to the mix of human development, leading to you, me, and—as of this writing—six and a half billion self-aware others.

With family dynamics, the past often predicts the future. One of the first to systematically explore this was Murray Bowen.

Families are systems.

Murray Bowen was a psychiatrist growing up in the last century who noticed the schizophrenics under his care were severely affected by family visits. It's hard to imagine, but in those days mental illness was not generally considered a family problem, and the idea that the family was a homeostatic system (a system that worked in many ways to maintain the status quo) was novel and even threatening to many mental health workers.

Bowen developed a whole science of examining families—looking at all the relationships between family members—as interconnecting systems of mutual influence. He observed how people characteristically made alliances with other family members, enacted family roles and patterns, and unconsciously maintained the status quo.

In “closed systems,” the status quo resisted change with isolation, problems, and conflicts. In “open systems,” the status quo was growth oriented, the family welcomed input from the outside, and members engaged in mostly clean communication.

The conservative East coast of the sixties was not as intrigued by Bowen's ideas as the West coast's Humanistic Psychology movement. Bowen eventually moved to Northern California, near the fabled Esalen Institute, and taught his family systems approach well into his sixties. In his later years, he maintained that developing family systems as a science was his greatest contribution. My friend Marlene Roberts saw him work once in a demonstration, and from what she told me, I think his greatest

contribution was his compassion and wise presence working with families as dynamic, organic, interconnected mini-cultures.

During this same period, another giant of the family systems movement, Argentinean Salvador Minuchin, found that healthy families were hierarchical, with Mom and Dad cooperatively in charge and dedicated to the highest good, followed in authority by other adult family members, older children, and then younger children. When a family member screwed up this hierarchy by being a tyrant—generally a dominating adult in a closed system—or by blasting the family with symptoms—often an acting-out child or adolescent—everybody went crazy.

Reason #75: The moral transgressions of affairs dramatically reduce parents' credibility to kids. Kids—especially teens—tend to be moralistically sensitive to hypocrisy. Cheating and tolerating cheating are behaviors they find contemptible, and so such parents lose moral authority.

When families have chronic problems, they tend to maintain those problems (unhealthy homeostasis) unless enough members grow and change to create new, healthier patterns. In other words, negative patterns tend to repeat themselves unless *self-aware consciousness*—in the form of people waking up to new, better perspectives and actions—intervenes to choose change and growth. Such growth leads to individuals becoming more mature and self-sufficient emotionally—what Bowen called “differentiated”—and acting with their more mature perspectives to encourage other family members to support healthy novelty. In these healthy systems, the hierarchy involves firm but fair parents in charge, followed by children who are known, accepted, and protected by parents with the goals of healthy development, good relationships, and family love/joy/community.

More brutal physics.

Get a big piece of paper and chart your family with you and your spouse in the center of the chart, and your parents, siblings, children, aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents all connected

with lines. Use colored pencils/pens/crayons if you want, it makes a prettier chart—a chart Murray Bowen called a “genogram.”

Now, add notes on peoples’ professions, temperaments, strengths, and weaknesses. Write down who had affairs, who divorced and when the divorces happened, and who had/has addiction/crime/mental illness problems. Be creative, draw pictures, make associations, and look for patterns. Connect people in happy relationships with smooth, graceful lines. Connect people with acrimonious, painful relationships with jagged lines. Use broken lines to indicate ruptured relationships with no contact. Enter timelines of your and your spouse’s previous lover relationships, and write down how long love affairs lasted, when they ended, and how they ended—for instance, did you leave, did your lover leave, or did anybody cheat? Finally, draw lines of dots between people who barely connect—like spouses who rarely talk, or a father who doesn’t relate much with his daughter. See anything interesting? Do certain problems show up more than once?

Notice how strengths and gifts run in families. Professions like teachers, doctors, and other helpers, temperaments like joyful spirits and personal integrity, and values like commitment to education, and social/financial success will often appear repetitively. These are the often-heroic family myths/identities we are most comfortable acknowledging and sharing.

On the shadowy, darker side, unless you and your spouse have an extraordinarily unusual history, you’ll also see predispositions for all kinds of problems in your genogram. Depression, anxiety, abuse, addiction, divorce, infidelity, financial problems, and school failure also tend to run in families.

Reason #76: When your kids and relatives draw their genograms, you want mostly good stuff coming from you. Cheating, codependently enabling abuse or addiction, or being an abuser or an addict are not value added in family systems, and look pretty bad next to your name on genograms.

Why do all these family dynamics happen? Numerous factors influence development. Genetic endowment, goodness-of-fit between the temperaments of parents and children, social learning, environmental toxins, and parents' education levels inform our emerging selves.

Rupert Sheldrake, an English biologist, believes that each species and each family generate energetic fields called, "morphogenic fields," that guide development. Any thought or action from one of us influences such fields, which evolve as families and cultures evolve. A family therapist named Bert Hellinger developed a technique called "family constellations" where he asks members of a non-related group to stand in for one person's extended family. Such groups routinely generate eerie experiences like the mellow member who's standing in for grandpa blowing up before you tell him about grandpa's explosive temper.

I suspect all of the above factors account for intergenerational transmissions of strengths and weaknesses, plus mysterious other factors that will emerge in years to come.

The brutal physics of development refers to the fact we develop powerful habits of thought, action, and defense from conception to death, which naturally constellate into characteristic patterns of intimacy, which are in turn transmitted through generations. Positive habits keep cultures civil and tend to support happiness and joy. Negative habits lead to repetitive suffering, especially in relationships. As relationships become more intimate, deeper defensive patterns manifest as habitual shared problems—essentially forms of violence. If there is a pattern of cheating, cheating tends to show up. If there are patterns of addiction or abuse, addiction and abuse tend to show up. Destructive defensive relational tendencies are there to some extent in all of us, *and will show up one way or another*. Without *conscious intervention*, they keep injuring people, relationship after relationship, generation after generation. Cumulatively, destructive relational patterns become toxic family scripts—tragic family myths—like the painful

intergenerational problems you might have observed in your genogram.

Family scripts can be changed through deepening awareness, and healthy thought and action. We can notice defensive states at the distressed emotion/distorted perspectives/destructive impulses/reduced empathy stage and decide to soothe distressed emotions, cultivate compassionate perspectives, and reach for healthy actions, empathy, and self-reflection. If we do this consistently, destructive patterns that harm relationships can morph into healthy patterns that support intimacy. All human experience is profoundly connected to intimate relationships, and healthy intimate relationships form the foundation of most fulfilling lives. In fact, if you include relationships with ourselves, *everything* about humans can be understood in terms of relationships. Honoring the good while gradually transforming the bad in our relationships supports all development.

Reason #77: You changing for the better today immediately uplevels every living relative's genogram. Continuing self-destructive patterns has the opposite effect.

Humans are social. Most prison wardens now agree that solitary confinement is *cruel and unusual* punishment. Most psychotherapeutic theorists and practitioners like Susan Johnson—the originator of Emotionally Focused Therapy, John Gottman the noted couples researcher, William Glasser—the originator of Reality Therapy, and Dan Siegel—the father of interpersonal neurobiology, agree that relationships are central to life, development, and happiness. My own *Attuned Family*, *The Gift of Shame*, and *Sessions* extensively explore how attuned relationships with others and interior aspects of ourselves are foundations of satisfying life and effective psychotherapy. My upcoming, *Intimacy and Evolution*, makes the case that healthy intimacy with ourselves, others, and spirit optimizes the evolutionary force for greater coherence that flows through all of us.

People connect with others, need connection with others, and naturally form patterns of connection with others. Arguably, the deepest connections—certainly the ones that most shape our neural/social/relational development—are family connections. For better or worse, husbands, wives, children, parents, and in-laws naturally form self-sustaining systems that have characteristic strengths, weaknesses, and blind spots.

Go back to your genogram chart and highlight everyone's affairs and romantic infatuations with a red marker. One thing you'll probably notice is how little you really know about other people's romantic/sexual history, and how reluctant you are to explicitly examine some aspects of your sexual past (shame makes us *reluctant to look*). Another thing that's likely to stand out is that affairs and romantic infatuations correlate generally with poor intimate relationships, and specifically with divorce.

Jock and Carol.

Jock finally entered therapy in his sixties, a father of four, furious at his wife Carol's sexual indifference. At nineteen, he chose her to be the ideal mother that had never existed in his family of origin. Carol was giving and loving, but progressively dissociated away from Jock's fierce sexual needs. She got hurt and confused when he tried to discuss sex with her—not surprising because Jock was usually frustrated and coercive by the time he got up the courage to talk. Jock's frustration and resentment grew as the years past.

Jock loved Carol, and because his father had cheated and left his mother, he resolved to never do the same. He had brief affairs in the beginning of their marriage, but when the kids came he devoted himself to his family and work. He swore he would never divorce and he hadn't. Jock still loved Carol and desired her passionately.

Carol loved her family, but was frightened of Jock's anger, withdrawal, and disapproval. She was magnetized by Jock when he was engaged, present, and in touch with his wry sense of humor.

She was frightened of him frustrated, impatient, or irritated. In her family, it was rude to discuss sexuality, rage, or critical judgment, and she just spaced out when Jock became intense. She was one of those women who needed arousal to feel desire after romantic infatuation passed, and felt sexually crippled comparing herself to media standards of “health” which insisted desire must lead to arousal. All this combined with her discomfort with the whole area of sexuality led to her becoming essentially asexual—a state that regularly left Jock despairing.

All these characteristics reflect Jock and Carol’s development. In therapy, it soothed them to understand that strengths and vulnerabilities are influenced by family programming, but ultimately guided by personal decisions. In this segment, they discuss waking up to new understandings. Sessions like these are precious when they happen. Much psychotherapy is slogging through the detritus and drama of daily life, and affairs generate particularly nasty problems that need to be processed and resolved. On the other hand, there are regular moments of transcendence in therapy sessions, sometimes appearing magically, seemingly out of nowhere. This session, occurring after many months of work, was especially sweet:

Jock: “Each day last week when I came home, I felt Carol was glad to see me when I walked in the door. She smiled and gave me warm hugs.” He looks fondly over at her.

Carol: Appreciative, but a little defensive. “You didn’t give me much to smile about for awhile, Jock. But I do love to see you when you get home, and I’ve been trying to be more affectionate.” Jock doesn’t bite on the criticism, but rather supports the positive parts of Carol’s message with a tender expression and reaching out to squeeze her hand. She looks gratefully at him. For years, any criticism on her part was met with his immediate defensive anger.

Keith: “You two have come a long way since we started therapy. I can feel how trust and affection are growing. And did you notice how you didn’t take the, ‘Didn’t give me much to smile about,’ and turn it into a defensive argument? Good work.”

Jock: “I’m finally getting how to listen without attacking Carol. I felt like saying something about the comment, but told

myself to focus on how she's working at being more positive.”

Carol: “I am trying to do that more. I never realized how important me just being nice and connected was to you.”

Keith: “Your marriage is the most important relationship in both your lives. These days it's getting the attention and respect it deserves.”

This is typical of couples who do the work of changing negative patterns into positive patterns. They gradually develop standards of warmth, kindness, and transparent communication that supplant the old bad habits. If they do this before the children are grown, intergenerational defensive tendencies can be changed, and everybody's genogram *now and in subsequent generations* has more love and less suffering.

To get to these great new places, we have to deal with material we'd rather avoid. This is especially true for affairs, which leads me to the theory of stinkstorms.

The Theory of Stinkstorms.

Natural disasters leave horrible messes. After hurricanes have come and gone, after earthquakes have ended, after the waters have receded and the survivors have been rescued, there is always a huge mess. The people who clean up the mess are heroes. It takes them months—years—to salvage communities, rebuild streets and houses, and restore happy neighborhoods. I identify with these people because—though my work only takes me metaphorically into flooded-out neighborhoods—it takes me directly into traumatized families.

Affairs create stinkstorms in a couple's universe, and I've participated in countless toxic cleanups. The discovery of an affair generates a stinky storm that seems to come out of nowhere and hover for what seems like forever, delivering waves of noxious downpours, sometimes steadily for days, and sometimes brief poisonous sprinkles on an otherwise beautiful morning. Affair stinkstorms fade over the months and years, but leave pockets of distress that keep getting restimulated and need to be cleaned up. Successful couples get better at such cleanups. Unsuccessful partners never learn to practice the necessary skills, or—worse—

keep having more affairs that create progressively worse stinkstorms.

Often the beginning of therapy is when the betrayed spouse discovers the affair. I enter the drama when someone like Alfred in the following exchange makes an appointment and comes to my office. Alfred is forty-five, second generation English, wiry from workouts with his running club, and looking haggard and sad as he sits down in an armchair. I feel a sense of dread and vague shame in my solar plexus—often signs of an approaching stinkstorm:

Alfred: After very brief pleasantries. “My wife Cynthia found out I’m seeing another woman. She exploded, but then she calmed down and said she needed some time with me out of the house. She told me to leave and I’m staying at my friend Raymond’s. I don’t know what to tell the kids, they’re only six and eight. I don’t want to lose my marriage.”

Keith: I think to myself, “*I thought so. The question now is, ‘How big is this stinkstorm?’*”

At this point I know that there’s a good chance Alfred, Cynthia and I will spend a couple of hundred hours over the next two or three years weathering, digging out, and recovering from stinkstorms. I look at Alfred, sensing essential decency, and suddenly feel a flash of love for him. I briefly see him, Cynthia, and me together, one or two hours a week, exploring their lives, wounds, and deepest yearnings. My job will be to keep them focused on healing the wounds, reaching for joyful/loving lives, and honoring their yearnings.

Keith: I take a deep breath. A scene from *Casablanca* comes into my head, when Rick says, “Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.” I focus all my attention on Alfred. He desperately wants to make his family whole again. “Alfred, tell me everything that happened. I know this is a shitstorm, but I’ve dealt with them before, and—believe me—it can turn into more love for everybody. If you commit yourself to integrity and loving Cynthia and the kids, this might be the best thing that ever happened to your family.”

Alfred: His face blanks out in confusion at this completely disorienting perspective, which is exactly why I said it. Two years from now, when he has woken up to who he and Cynthia are as lovers and friends, I’ll remind both of them of this conversation. By then, there will be no secrets. He and Cynthia will share everything, and feel securely connected most of the time. Their focus will be on expanding love throughout their life together. At this moment, such

perspectives are incomprehensible. “What do you mean? This is a fucking catastrophe!”

Keith: I smile, feeling the beginning rhythms of what will likely be a long dance together: “I mean, this crisis is like a death in your marriage. You and Cynthia need to be reborn into a joyful relationship. The only way to get through this together is to mature as individuals and create a deeper, more passionate love with one another. I can help you do this, but it will take time, effort, and incredible changes.”

Alfred: Desperate, doubtful, but also feeling a flickering sense of hope because it sounds like he might get through this nightmare with his marriage and family together. “OK. Tell me what to do.”

And so it goes. Alfred and Cynthia ended well. Some don't. My job is to offer the possibility of the gold ring, the joyful marriage. Their job is to decide whether or not to consistently reach for it to deepen their love.

Resolving problems heals families.

Look at your genogram again, and mark where and when people have constellated and healed relational conflicts. Note when the conflict was most intense, and when the principals (husband/wife, daughter/mother, brother/sister, etc.) finally resolved back to love.

As you consider these conflict and resolution patterns, how do you feel? If you and your brother were at odds when you were a teenager, and you feel great about each other now, or if your sister couldn't be in the same room with your father when she was in high school, but they get along well now, how does that affect your sense of family? For most of us, family relationships resolving into love *always* is a good thing. More love consistently seems to result in the highest good of everybody.

Reason #78: Indulging affairs usually involves us denying, rationalizing, and misrepresenting stinkstorms. Engaging in an affair usually requires minimizing of toxic downpours. Awareness of the suffering you are causing takes a lot of the fun out of cheating.

As demonstrated by Carol and Jock, and Alfred and Cynthia, resolving affair stinkstorms into greater compassion, deeper

consciousness, and more love is usually the outcome we want, especially in families where children get to experience the process as a positive family value they can take pride in and live by. This predisposes children to healthy relationships. Any therapist/minister/counselor will tell you that the gold standard of marriage counseling is a couple establishing a stable, growing love full of friendship, trust, and regular erotic passion.

Another positive outcome of positively resolving stinkstorms can be for either spouse to discover they can't have authenticity and expanding love, and so leave to create a new life—but leave cleanly. Also, even with eventual divorce, if in addressing marital conflict you work on your own growth and develop the courage to stand up firmly but respectfully for satisfying intimacy, you are more likely to have superior love in the future. I believe this is why second marriages are statistically happier and shorter than first marriages. They're happier because people better discern and insist on expanding love. They're shorter because people have grown to better notice problems and set boundaries. Because they've been through it before, issues are more quickly resolved or people say “no” more easily.

Reason #79: If you cheat and divorce, everyone will treat you worse. As news of your affair percolates through social networks, friends and family will blame you more than your spouse. Schoolteachers and administrators will judge you immature and irresponsible. Mediators will privately condemn you. Your personal attorney will be a shallow sociopath and care less (“don't hire sociopaths” is a wonderful all-purpose employment principle) or will have moral disapproval that you complicated his task by cheating before you divorced.

Daniel.

Daniel came to me after thirty-one years of marriage to an immature and emotionally abusive partner, Tessa. He had just left Tessa, was seeing another woman, and couldn't understand why he kept saying, “Yes,” to Tessa's increasingly unreasonable and

selfish demands. In their marriage, Tessa had always refused therapy, and had discouraged Daniel from seeking help. Daniel was referred to me by a businessman friend who said I was a reasonable guy who offered practical help.

In our work, the pattern of Daniel codependently rescuing distressed family members emerged as an intergenerational problem. From his earliest years, Daniel directed his considerable humor, energy, and intelligence to rescue his critical, demanding father—who had been bullied by *his* father. Tessa was narcissistic and charismatic like Daniel’s father, and didn’t fully reveal her selfish, sadistic side until well after the kids were born. By that time Daniel had learned to solve their family problems by working harder and saying “yes” more consistently—a process that provided immediate de-escalation in specific episodes, but over time amplified negative drama. When I first met Daniel, Tessa, their two adult children, and Daniel himself were all acting out destructively one way or another.

Gradually Daniel learned how to say, “no,” and set boundaries. The kids responded well, but Tessa went crazy, spending all their money on unnecessary legal maneuvers and thoughtless, impulsive purchases. Regularly, she would call or email Daniel in crisis and demand a rescue. Often he felt helpless in the face of her influence and surrendered to her demands, but over time he worked hard to discern healthy responses and more consistently apply them. In the end, the family fortune was completely spent, but Daniel had liberated himself from his passive aggressive tendencies and emotional enslavement to Tessa. He no longer allowed himself to blank out and automatically comply when being attacked by an intimate family member.

Reason #80: Affairs are often passive-aggressive sadistic attacks on a spouse we are afraid to deal with directly, while also being unconscious cries for help. As a cry for help, affairs pull hostility, not caring. As a “fuck you!” to a hated spouse, they create dangerous negative drama.

“System” means all family members affect one another.

No matter what the outcome of couples’ work, you can see how each partner’s successes and failures have profound impacts on the rest of the family. Since we’re connected to others, and the only person we are really in charge of is our self, what we decide to with our life and relationships has enduring consequences for a lot of people—our children, spouse, extended family, and our spouse’s family. This means *you* taking care of yourself and resolving your relational issues serves a bunch of important people. Each of us growing and resolving problems helps heal families, which in turn—even though people often resist scary change—influences families to morph from toxic closed systems to healthy open ones.

CHAPTER SEVEN: YOU'RE HAVING A SECRET AFFAIR.

There are critical points in affairs that tend to influence the severity and duration of subsequent stinkstorms. You can roughly plot these along an infidelity continuum from least destructive towards most destructive. Least destructive begins with such minor problems as random fantasies and distracting attractions, and progresses through ongoing flirtations, romantic infatuations, secret meetings, initial holding/kissing/fondling, one or two episodes of intercourse, an extended secret relationship, being discovered by your spouse to be having a secret affair, and finally being discovered by your spouse and then lying about it. I suppose we could continue the scale to physical violence and actual murder, but for most of us the worst it's going to get is discovery of an ongoing affair plus lying about it. Examples of other nasty variables that tend to jack up pain amplitude include having an affair with one of your wife's best friends, with your husband's business partner, or with your child's childcare provider or teacher. We often feel more ripped off when the person our spouse is cheating with has a relationship with our children or us. It's also particularly distressing to contract a venereal disease from your partner's secret affair.

Each one of the above corresponds to an increase in stinkstorm magnitude. Some couples respond to such trauma by separating and divorcing. Others want to save their marriages, often with the help of therapy. Healing from infidelity generally requires a shared, active commitment from both spouses.

If you are the strayer, you also might have to do some work with your lover. Luckily, if you haven't progressed to active involvement with another, you might not even have to include the object of your desire. For example, if you secretly lust after your kind, wonderful boss, flirt occasionally, but have never explicitly let him know you want him, you very well might be able to resolve your distracting attraction without risking a difficult and potentially dangerous conversation that could endanger your job. On the other hand, if you and he have a secret relationship

involving intimate talking and touching, you'll definitely have to have some conversations and set some boundaries, and perhaps even consult with a lawyer about legal rights and responsibilities.

Reason #81: Having an affair with someone at work potentially wrecks your job. *If you are the boss, you risk censure from management and sexual harassment charges. If your lover is higher on the company power hierarchy than you, you are likely to be sacrificed if the affair causes problems.*

Other variables—sometimes quite surprising—can influence the intensity of the trauma and the arc of recovery for everyone involved on the infidelity continuum—which is everyone who knows you and especially your intimate friends and family. Four common examples are:

- One of your kids might be particularly primed to be traumatized by a mother or father's secret affair.
- Your spouse might have been sexually wounded in such a way that the pain of the affair is amplified. Studies consistently show twenty to forty percent of girls have had some kind of unwanted sexual abuse or intrusion during their development, and roughly half that for boys. Such trauma might predispose your spouse to have dramatic emotional explosions in the face of sexual betrayal.

Reason #82: Your affair can open a Pandora's box of extreme reactions in your family. *Human defensive programming is sensitive, powerful and demanding. Infidelity throws a wrench into these delicate processes—evoking all kinds of unpleasant possibilities. Your wife might decide to cheat on you. Your husband might immediately leave and file for divorce. Your spouse might turn to drugs, alcohol, depression, or delusion. Your children might develop all kinds of symptoms. Your extended family might freak out. Whatever the reactions, they won't be fun.*

- Your lover might be heartbroken at losing you and fall to pieces, leaving you aching to reach out and help.
- Even worse, your lover might go crazy.

The “Fatal Attraction syndrome.”

The movie, *Fatal Attraction*, created quite a stir when it was released. Glen Close played a hot woman with borderline personality disorder (BPD). In the therapy universe, the shorthand term for someone suffering from borderline personality disorder is “borderline.” Borderlines have primitive defenses that cause them to get real “Old testament,” (as Quentin Tarantino puts it in *Pulp Fiction*) when *feeling* injured—and borderlines *always eventually feel injured by people they become intimate with*. Both men and women can develop borderline personality disorder, but the combination in lovers I’ve found most commonly is a borderline woman with a somewhat insensitive, narcissistic man.

A borderline is drawn to relational drama. When she discovers someone who attracts her, she idealizes that person, which can feel deliciously seductive. Feeling an erotically radiant woman relate to you as some combination of Jesus, Buddha, Elvis, Brad Pitt, and George Clooney—sex-god archetypes—is hard to resist. In *Fatal Attraction*, the Glen Close character first experiences married Michael Douglas as irresistible. They meet, have hot illicit sex, and love fills the universe.

The Michael Douglas character feels guilty (he has a nice wife) and breaks it off, telling his new lover, “It’s over.” To her, this rejection is abuse, and she is compelled to torment him until he decides to love her again. In a nice approximation of the different levels of progressive insanity borderlines can be capable of, she pleads, harasses, rages, kills small animals (the famous bunny-boiling scene), and finally murderously attacks him with a knife.

The movie uses a device that made another screenwriter, Joe Eszterhas (who wrote the screenplays for sex/violence extravaganzas *Basic Instinct* and *Showgirls*), rich and famous. You put a feminine person in a sexually charged drama, and then have her go crazy like a masculine person. Crazy guys are way more likely to kill small animals and physically assault others than crazy women. Feminine people—even borderlines like the Glen Close

character—tend to attack others more emotionally than physically. If physical violence appears, it is more often self-mutilation or suicide gestures. Borderlines usually have bodily damage or injury—such as eating disorders, suicide attempts, or chronic injury—as part of their universe.

On the other hand the *Fatal Attraction* borderline villain is true to the syndrome. Most of us are wired to bond quickly with someone we have erotic polarity with, proximity to, and encouragement from, imagining them to be an ideal mate. A few of us are born especially emotionally reactive and are subjected to early neglect or abuse—the combination that tends to result in borderline defenses which can quickly shift perspectives under stress from idealization to demonization. This generates *unstable and dramatic relationships*.

Narcissists—who believe themselves wonderful, entitled, beautiful, and privileged—will demean and withdraw when they feel abused, often discarding bereaved lovers without much thought. They become the Don Juans and Catherine the Greats of infidelity—men and women who embrace their egocentric needs for constant love and admiration while relating to their lovers primarily as objects rather than people who deserve honesty and compassion. Narcissists are actually more disturbed than borderlines because they have difficulty maintaining a relationship when distressed, but also less dangerous for the same reason—they demean and withdraw rather than cling and torture.

When stress-induced demonization occurs, borderlines tend to stay connected—sometimes for years—clinging to and torturing a demonized lover compulsively. I mentioned before that in my experience BPD appears more often in women, and some studies support this. I think men with this syndrome more often act out on others and accelerate self-destructive behaviors—like addictions—more enthusiastically, thus making them more at risk than women to be in jail, or physically disabled by poor choices.

Borderlines are particularly prone to secret affairs. They're drawn to drama, are impulsive and self-destructive, don't care much about collateral damage to wives and families, and—because in general their relationships are unstable—they are often unattached and hunting for love. Borderlines also adore—even worship—their lover deliciously in beginning relationships, which is intoxicatingly seductive. For instance, I've learned to be very cautious of a client who—after only one session—says, “I've seen a lot of therapists who weren't that good, but *you* are the best therapist I've ever had!”

Reason #83: A man or woman willing to impulsively betray her family and yours in the interest of romantic fulfillment is much more likely to be a borderline or narcissist than one who seriously weighs the costs of cheating.

Low functioning borderlines are often easy to spot. They have reams of problems, frequently are addicted to drugs and/or alcohol, attack their bodies with eating disorders or self-mutilation, and have histories of dramatic failures in relationships and jobs—where abilities to love and work are compromised by crippling defensive habits. Moderately functioning borderlines can appear quite successful in relationships and work, but periodically, usually under the influence of increased stress, lapse into distorted drama. High functioning borderlines can have what look like normal healthy lives, and maintain relationships for decades if they are wise or lucky enough to choose a codependent helper for a mate. “Codependent,” meaning the partner will consistently give in to the demands and distortions of a borderline spouse. Daniel's wife Tessa in the previous chapter is a good example of a moderately functioning borderline who went insane when Daniel stopped codependently enabling her sick selfishness.

If you have borderline relationship patterns, don't stress out, just enter therapy. If you focus on how to better regulate your painful emotions and add compassion to your distorted thoughts and violent impulses, you can be a happy, healthy person within one to three years of work.

If your lover has borderline personality disorder, be prepared for lots of painful negative drama, especially when you resolve to end the affair (which, since you've read this far, hopefully is really soon).

If your husband or wife has borderline personality disorder, the healing process from an affair will be painfully prolonged by his or her obsessing about your betrayals (even if *they* also have had affairs), and by relentless, irresistible impulses to punish you. Daniel's wife Tessa litigating away all their resources in endless unnecessary divorce proceedings is a good example. When he left her, established an independent life, and radically improved his relationships with their adult children, the material arrangements of their divorce became her only avenue of attack, and she kept tormenting him through lawsuits till the bitter end, when a judge finally mandated a comprehensive settlement.

Fatal Attraction was a modern day cautionary morality play which captured our collective attention. Affairs start fun and become insane—sometimes ridiculously insane. If you think you're immune, guess again.

Waking up.

Waking Up is the title of a book I wrote about Integrally informed psychotherapy, which is a way of understanding people and therapy from many perspectives. Therapy is all about waking up to new insights about self, relationships, and the world. If you're having a secret affair, at some point you wake up and realize something has to change, that life has become unmanageable. Maybe you're sick of lying to your spouse—and probably also to your lover. Maybe the bloom is off the rose, and the people you and your lover have become are unattractive to you. Maybe the guilt and stress of a double life is finally too much to bear. Whatever the reason, sometimes frustration, shame, guilt, or despair motivate us to face problems and look for solutions.

Reason #84: It's much easier—and infinitely less painful—to wake up to the insanity of an impulse, or an inappropriate

flirtation, than to the nightmare of self as betrayer. It can actually be a huge relief to notice yourself on the brink of a colossal mistake, and step back from the edge just in time. Often this courageous action is followed by some waking up version of, “What was I thinking?” or, “My God! What did I almost do?” Believe it or not, such moments shared with spouses can lead to deeper intimacy and eroticism if processed with compassion—especially with the help of therapists who know the terrain.

Unfortunately, this point is frequently where people get into even more trouble by deciding to lie about the whole thing. Believe me, you don’t protect your spouse by lies of omission—never revealing infidelity—or commission—“I never had relations with that woman.”

When you realize you need to end the madness, it’s time to be honest in service of love. If you’ve been having an affair and have finally woken up and resolved to address the chaos, you probably need to stop seeing your lover and tell your spouse everything.

“**Oh no!**” you say.

Oh yes.

Trying to “protect” your spouse from a secret relationship locks you into a lifetime of separation through guilty secrets. As we discussed earlier, your partner almost certainly knows something is fishy through mirror neurons, subtle signals, and intersubjective energies. If you want a growing marital love, treat your spouse as if he or she wants the same. Give them the benefit of your transparent honesty in service of love.

Reason #85: Never having an affair is the best way to avoid the horrible, “Honey, I’ve been seeing someone else,” conversation.

One exception to this is if you’re separating/divorcing anyway. In this case—occasionally—it can be better not to cause any further suffering, and just leave—though most husbands and wives being left are compelled to ask, “Is there someone else?” Another exception is if you’re convinced your outraged spouse is likely to

do violence to themselves, you, or your lover. On the other hand, this is also a frequent loophole—a variant of, “He/she can’t handle it.” Usually spouses can handle the truth about affairs better than we give them credit for.

Reason #86: If your spouse is capable of going crazy, you’re better off finding out in therapy working on increasing mutual satisfaction, than in the emotional cyclone of sexual betrayal.

People have told me over the years, “Keith, let’s you and me work on this affair thing in individual therapy. If it turns out I absolutely have to tell my wife/husband—well...then...OK.”

Sometimes I’ve said, “yes” to this request, but more often these days I refuse to continue therapy without transparency. I want to help the whole family, including spouse and kids. Over the years I’ve discovered that when you’ve been cheated on, you want to hear about it as soon as possible, and you feel like a fool (shame emotions) when you think other people have known about the betrayal and didn’t let you in on the secret. This goes double for therapists. Several times I’ve had the experience of conducting a series of individual and marriage counseling sessions where I gradual help the unfaithful partner fully commit to the other spouse and come clean with the affair, only to have the other stop therapy with me, furious because I had gone along with the secret. I’ve come to realize the validity of one partner feeling offended that I tacitly supported a major lie—even for a few sessions. I now advocate full disclosure as much as possible from the very beginning of therapy.

So, if you’re willing to stop the affair and work on your marriage, what are the steps?

First, develop a clear resolve.

You can’t work successfully on your marriage while actively involved with a lover. Many have tried; none that I know of have succeeded. Your pleasure biochemistry is more entangled with the intoxicating romantic infatuation with your lover than with the intimate bonding neurochemistry with your spouse. Painfully

struggling to improve communication, romance, and sex with someone you currently fear and regularly loathe is impossible if you can get in your car and hook up easily you're your hot lover. If you and your lover stay together long enough, relational defensive states will show up, but people are simply unconcerned about such things in the midst of a love affair. In the throes of romantic infatuation it's hard to imagine that deepening intimacy always cues deeper defenses

If you are unclear in your resolve to stop your affair, try the following exercise:

- Get a notebook and each day for four days go to a private spot—hopefully one you don't associate strongly with either your spouse or lover—and write for ten to twenty minutes about everything that is going on. Let your feelings, thoughts, and images pour out onto the pages. It works better if you write by hand instead of computer. Show these pages to *no one*.
- On the fifth day, again go to a private spot and read everything that you've written.
- After you've read your pages, destroy them.

This exercise often helps guide people through difficult transitions, especially when confronted with hard choices and amplified emotions. It tends to result in understanding that the affair has to stop, or a need to separate from your spouse. If, like most people, you decide to break up with your lover, you move to the next step.

Divorce sidebar: *If you decide you want to leave your marriage, tell your spouse and then find a lawyer/mediator you can both go to for information about your rights and responsibilities under the law. Also, get into therapy. You are a grown-up and have the right to decide to divorce your spouse, but there are lots of consequences that will take months and years to work through. For more information on this, check out Chapter Fifty in my book, Waking Up.*

Tell your lover it's over, and you have to stop all communication.

People usually grieve when they break up with lovers, and often there is an extra tragic, star-crossed quality to secret lovers' breakups. In non-secret lover relationships where nobody is cheating, breaking up involves at least one partner losing that loving feeling. With secret lovers, the loving feeling can still be pumping as your breakup is driven by disintegrating families, professional catastrophes, and collapsed immune systems.

Reason #87: If you fall in love with your lover, you're likely to grieve painfully when the inevitable breakup occurs.

Here's where it's wonderful to have a supportive individual therapist. Your husband or wife will be unsympathetic at best as you struggle with the agony of ending a passionate affair. Your friends will feel hopelessly out of their depth, and are likely to be plugged into their own relational wounds. Most therapists will have training and experience in dealing with this flavor of grief, will offer solid advice and support, and will help you strategically deal with the different relationships as the process unfolds.

When you announce your resolve to your lover, he/she is likely to begin grieving, become distorted and impulsive, painfully miss your intimate connections, and unconsciously rationalize contacting you. Even though you ache to help their pain by connecting and comforting, *don't do it*. The last person who should be helping your lover with missing you is you. Instead, give clear messages about zero contact, and encourage therapy, talks with ministers/rabbis/spiritual advisors, support from friends, and general self-care. Then *cut your ties and avoid all contact*.

Most people ignore the above advice, and that's fine. Many of us need to burn our hand before we learn to not touch the hot stove. If you *do* keep connecting in person or by phone/email/texting/etc, pay attention to how you feel before and after the contacts. Soon you'll observe that they really don't help anybody.

Reason #88: It's often unexpectedly painful to have to say, "no contact" to your grieving lover. The more you care, the more heartbreaking it is to not be able to help with their agony of love lost and passion frustrated.

Call a therapist.

I know if your main tool is a hammer, all problems look like nails, but—even though I do think therapy is good for a wide array of issues—I especially think therapists help minimize suffering and maximize growth from secret affairs. Things are going to explode into crazy, and a good therapist can potentially help everybody.

Also, it is time to seriously consider the experience your wife/husband is going to have when you tell them you're been cheating. Resolving to stop seeing your lover, informing your lover it's over, and seeing a therapist are all decisions that will feel strangely good to your spouse, even as he or she struggles with impulses to punish or destroy you.

When I help couples reconcile, I want to help the cheater be as excellent a man or woman as possible to disrupt the black/white hatred that a cheated spouse feels when sexually betrayed. Breaking up with your lover and seeing a therapist additionally indicates you are willing to change and grow to salvage your marriage. You value family relationships—especially your marriage—enough to change.

When people freak out, they regress. Regressed people—like young children—want concrete, observable results in extreme situations. Mommy and three-year-old Alex are eating lunch at a restaurant with Mommy's friend, Alice. Mommy goes to the bathroom and Alex freaks out. He doesn't respond to Alice's reassurances, he doesn't know her well and is too upset to be soothed by her language. He relaxes immediately when he sees Mommy return. This is an observable, reassuring change that relaxes him. Your wife might want you to toss the suit you wore when you met your lover in Houston. Your husband might want to get a new bed because you and your lover had sex on the one you

have. I suggest you honor such requests. You have to refuse more extreme demands—for example, “I can’t live in this town any longer; we have to move to a new state.”—but it generally helps to make symbolic changes that feel meaningful to your injured spouse.

Reason #89: It’s a drag to toss the suit, buy a new bed, or never go to Kona again. Some such losses can only be prevented by avoiding the affair.

Making observable changes also fosters your spouse’s instincts for reconciliation. Say you’ve cheated on your husband, read this book, and taken the above steps. When you confess the whole mess, your resolve to reconcile, to separate from your lover, and to enter therapy present tangible proof you value *him*. Such messages are likely to evoke complementary impulses in him—to value *you*. Couples need such positive efforts to make it through the inevitable stinky storms to a better, more joyful, passionate marriage.

Tell your spouse everything and enter marriage counseling.

Here we go.

There is no good time to disclose a secret affair, but there *are* bad times. Don’t do it when either of you has had anything to drink, and don’t begin late at night or when anybody is physically exhausted or especially stressed from a hard day. Other than that, just do it and answer questions for a while. Husbands and wives often want to know specific details about sex, conversations, and activities. If you don’t want to answer, don’t lie, just say you’re not willing to answer that question right now, or you’ll talk about it in therapy.

Hopefully you have some loving, competent guidance. Try to find somebody who has helped couples you know and like. Most of my referrals come from people who’ve experienced my work in one form or another and suggest my services to friends, family, and organizations.

Your spouse is likely to have extreme reactions. Men and women go numb, rage, throw up, or space out. They scream or whisper, “I hate you,” “Get out of this house now,” or, “I’m going to divorce you.”

Don’t argue with outrageous stuff, *never* rationalize, and don’t offer loopholes. Just keep reporting the facts and your intent to be honest and heal your marriage. Be a broken record. If your husband or wife (usually wife) demands you leave, go to a friend’s place or somewhere else comfortable. If you allow shame, guilt, or distress to choose a miserable hotel, or sleeping in your car, you’ll just end up passive-aggressively blaming later.

Once in therapy, go with the flow.

People are infinitely complicated, so I won’t try to predict much past here. Just be prepared to be patient for a long time, use your therapist as a guide, and keep your eye on the prize, a steadily improving love.

Often people tell me, “I don’t think my husband/wife is capable of the kind of love I need to be happy. The only way to find out is to spend extended time—at least six months—doing your absolute best to grow and help him/her grow. It’s the least you can do after nuking your marriage with a secret affair.

CHAPTER EIGHT: YOU'VE DISCOVERED A SECRET AFFAIR.

Infidelity books always list warning signs for cheating. I know these lists can be useful, but to me they feel like the five danger signals of melanoma—you know, “a sudden change in a wart or mole...”—a little depressing. They mostly involve your spouse being more attractive, less available, or more mysterious. Is your spouse losing weight, more critical, more sexually appealing, less sexually available, looking better, “losing” a cell phone regularly, talking a lot about an opposite sex friend, keeping secret email accounts—stuff like that.

The bottom line is, something makes you wonder if your husband or wife is going out with another person and lying to you about it. I suggest that your first move in such a situation is to treat him or her like the partner you want. Ask straight out if there is someone else.

Celeste.

Celeste was not a suspicious woman. She liked her job, her son Morgan was doing fine in the fourth grade, and husband Tim had always been solid and faithful. One day while she was dusting, she moved his wallet off the bedroom side table, and a condom fell out.

“I felt blank, then cold, then really hot and angry.” She told me in an emergency session she scheduled the next day. “There’s no way that condom is for us. I’m on the pill. What should I do?”

“Ask him if he’s having an affair.” I suggest.

She blanches. “Just come right out and ask? Don’t you think I should check it out a little first?”

I take a sip of tea and lean back into my armchair. I suspect we are at the beginning of a long process, and I’ve found it helps to take my time in moments like this. “You mean, access his phone records, hack his email, or check up on him when he says he’s out somewhere?”

Celeste shifts around uncomfortably. “It sounds so cold and suspicious when you put it that way. I don’t want to hurt his feelings.”

I look into her eyes. “I know you don’t like to hurt anyone, and I’m not casually suggesting this. If Tim’s having an affair, then I’m sure it will be distressing to discover it. If he’s not having an affair, then there is some good reason for the condom and he deserves a chance to relieve your worries. Either way, not discussing it separates you further, because you’re already assuming he’s doing something wrong.”

Celeste looks down guiltily. “You’re right. I believe he’s seeing someone.”

Smiling, I say, “I read in one of my novels that when you assume you make an “ass” out of “u” and “me.”

She laughs shortly. “I know. I wish there was some other way.”

I nod in agreement. “Me too.”

Reason #90: You don’t want your spouse to go through the struggle, shame, outrage, and wrenching loneliness of discovering your infidelity.

Two days later I walk into my waiting room to find Tim and Celeste sitting at opposite ends of my couch, both looking unhappily straight ahead. “*Oh oh,*” I think to myself, “*But at least he told her some of the truth.*”

We troop into my office and began the long healing process. Sure enough, Tim had been seeing a woman down the street. When confronted, he confessed the whole thing. They’d met walking their dogs through the neighborhood, and have been lovers for several months. Tim feels humiliated and ashamed, and is willing to do what it takes to save his marriage.

This discovery was relatively straightforward. Celeste asked and Tim told the truth. What do you do if your spouse says “No,” but you’re convinced he or she is lying?

Checking up on your mate.

Not believing your husband or wife and checking up on them is a betrayal in its own right. I’ve worked with couples where phone

and credit card records are examined, computers are hacked, and private investigators are hired.

Strangely, unfaithful spouses can get quite irate when checked up on. “You violated my privacy!” often shows up self-righteously, occasionally sending a betrayed spouse into sputtering paroxysms of rage, especially if snooping is equated with the betrayal of the affair—as in “You checking up on me behind my back is just like me being unfaithful.”

I try to keep my sense of humor in such situations. “Look,” I say to the unfaithful spouse, “I suspect you’d check up on her if you thought she was cheating. Of course she felt something was wrong. Something *is* way wrong in her most important relationship. This has to be dealt with, and *you* weren’t dealing with it. I suggest you accept she did what she had to do. Your secret affair forced her *all by herself*, to handle a major tsunami.”

Reason #91: You feel like an idiot revealing your loopholes for what they generally are—stupid, selfish excuses to behave badly.

Once in a while a cheating spouse—usually the man—will “successfully” stonewall in the face of a partner’s suspicion. “No! I didn’t do anything. I have no idea where that condom came from.” I use “successfully” guardedly because the marriage has been injured, intimacy has been diminished, and there’s going to be an elephant in the living room until the truth is out.

Guys who get away with not discussing an affair often later complain about their wife’s distance or sexual indifference. Well, duh, what did you expect? Your wife has the miracle of human consciousness where she can live in the past/present/future from multiple perspectives. An unresolved suspicion of an affair tends to linger and reemerge regularly, often in the form of passive aggressive (meaning indirect expressions of anger) thoughts and behaviors directed at you.

Reason #92: Affairs can linger in marriages as signature traumas and then merge into unrelated conflicts. If you want to

avoid the, " Well, you cheated," rejoinder for almost any argument, don't have an affair.

I don't recommend private investigators or elaborate checking, but usually that has already happened by the time somebody calls me. If you are a suspicious and alarmed husband or wife, you will quite likely feel driven to know the truth. I recommend you do whatever feels right to find out what's going on, but always also seek out support and help. Whether you find out your spouse is cheating or not, find an experienced therapist and have some marriage counseling. Even if your spouse is not cheating, the fact that you suspected it and checked up secretly reflects some relational/trust/communication problems that need attention.

Get lots of help.

I often recommend both partners have individual therapists as well as a marriage therapist. Occasionally I'll have intermittent individual sessions with partners, but this can get a little sticky for a variety of reasons. It's hard for the betrayed spouse to fully trust their partner's therapist. Who knows what secrets are being shared? Once you've been lied to in a major way, crazy possibilities rear their ugly heads—and sometimes have validity.

If either of you feels your marriage is teetering on divorce, it's often a good idea for both of you to go to a lawyer/mediator to find out your rights and responsibilities of separation and divorce. This visit focuses everyone on the reality that we need to take this current situation *really* seriously—that there are major emotional/relational/financial consequences of separation.

Asking friends and family for support can be problematic. Most of us feel humiliated when someone else has betrayed us. I know this doesn't make sense rationally. Why should *I* feel ashamed when it was *you* who transgressed? On the other hand, your partner cheating can result in you feeling like a failure as a spouse, lover, or confidant. It's easy to imagine your friends and family asking themselves, "I wonder what she couldn't provide that motivated

him to seek other women?” “What was it about him that drove her to another man?”

To add to the humiliation, some of us are not comfortable being overtly angry. If you’ve ever heard yourself say some variant of, “I never get angry,” “I’m not angry; I’m hurt,” or, “I’m a little peeved, but not *angry*,” you probably have some difficulty feeling and acknowledging anger. To betrayed spouses who aren’t comfortable being overtly angry, the rage of betrayal can come out indirectly by attacking themselves. “I’m a miserable husband,” “I was never the lover you wanted,” “Everybody will think it was because I didn’t keep you happy at home,” are all examples of rage turned inward.

Reason #93: If you divorce, you will lose friend/family relationships. *Sometimes friends and family maintain intimate connections with both separating spouses, but usually some important relationships are lost to each partner.*

All that being said, you need support from people you trust. Besides therapists, spiritual counselors, and health practitioners, there will probably be friends or family members you can confide in safely. With the exception of your children—*never* turn to them at the beginning stages of processing a secret affair—it’s a good idea to find people you can trust to be confidential, and then share everything with them.

Why not share the whole story with the kids?

You tell me. Is it in your kids’ best interests to endure the overwhelming hurt/anger/shame that you and your spouse will have to process in the coming months? Further, staying together and divorcing constitute wildly different realities for everybody. It behooves you and your spouse to be clear on what your shared resolve is before getting the kids explicitly involved.

Once a married couple is *fully resolved* to separate or reconcile, *then* it’s a good idea to sit down with a therapist and figure out the most honest and clear way to explain to children what is going on. The truth will need to be expressed in language consistent with

your child's worldview. My bias is always to both frame and express the current situation in ways that will potentially guide and inspire children to be more self-aware, wiser in the ways of love and sex, and eventually more understanding of what it takes to create and sustain a superior relationship. An example is the following conversation that Celeste, Tim, and I had during our tenth session:

Tim: "Our son Morgan asked me yesterday if I had a girlfriend."

Celeste: "O great! And you didn't think to inform me until now? What did you tell him?"

Tim: He looks out the window. "I told him, 'No, I don't have a girlfriend. I love your mother.'"

Celeste: "You mean you lied to him." Tim looks confused.

Keith: "Hey, wait a minute. I don't think Tim lied. That's your anger talking. He doesn't currently have a girlfriend, and he does love you."

Celeste: "Then why did he cheat?" This comes up often with a wife, who tends equate her husband having sex with another woman with not loving her. Guys who prize their marriage and family and create affairs for sexual fulfillment routinely get confused and frustrated by this belief. On the other hand, wives often fall in love with their lovers and frame the affair as being swept up by the grand currents of romance, which is equally incomprehensible to some men.

Keith: "Tim was selfish and screwed up. That's why he cheated. He created a catastrophe that you're forced to deal with because you love each other and want to save the marriage. Don't make it worse than it is."

Celeste: "Well, what do we tell Morgan? He's only nine years old."

Keith: "For now, the foundation is in place for future conversations. Tim doesn't have a girlfriend and he loves you. If Morgan asks further, you might tell him that sometimes parents have trouble solving problems and being kind and caring, and you've gone to a therapist for help. Nine-year-olds tend to be rule based, so you'll probably want to tell him some version of, 'The rule is, when married people have problems loving each other, they should get help.'"

Celeste: "I won't lie to my son! If he asks me if Tim cheated, I'm going to tell him." She looks self-righteously at Tim who hangs his head.

Keith: “I hardly ever recommend lying to anybody. If he presses, tell him the truth with an emphasis on what mature people do when they make mistakes and things go wrong. They do their best to serve the highest good for everybody.”

The highest good for everybody.

Once an affair has been uncovered, it’s time for everybody to grow up and act mature—if possible. The cheating spouse can no longer have it both ways—maintaining the illusion of a secure faithful marriage while seeking the heat of an illicit affair. The cheated-on spouse can no longer surrender to denial, or codependently enable the affair through self-neglect or emotional abuse (I like William Glasser’s seven traits of miserable partners: criticizing, complaining, nagging, threatening, stonewalling, rewarding, and punishing).

If your spouse decides to leave you, or refuses to break up with a lover, your path is pretty cut and dried. Create the kindest, fairest, and most mature divorce possible. Talk to mediators, get support, inform the children with age appropriate messages, divide up resources and apportion responsibilities in ways that are fair under the law and optimize the kids’ development, learn and grow from your experiences, and get on with creating a good life with better love than before.

A more problematic question is, “How do I decide whether to risk reconciliation, even if my spouse feels horrible about cheating, says it won’t happen again, and wants to save our marriage?”

The first order of business in answering this question is to try to figure out what is actually possible.

Is my marriage salvageable?

As someone who has watched pharmaceutical companies make hundreds of billions through self-serving ads that first scare people and then encourage them to pressure doctors into prescribing drugs that might not be necessary and often actually compromise health and well-being, I am reluctant to encourage anybody to over-diagnose themselves or their family. When we’re

mad, we exaggerate. If your husband gets drunk at a party once a year, and drinks moderately the rest of the time, he's probably not an alcoholic no matter how embarrassed you are that he threw up on your friend's carpet. If your wife seems particularly anxious, irritable, irrational, and clingy a week before her period, but is generally reasonable and happy with life, she probably doesn't have an anxiety disorder.

American insurance-driven medicine is a flawed system where insurance and managed-care companies advertise, promote, and promise packages of benefits, while openly protecting obscene 25% to 30% profits by maintaining bureaucracies dedicated to limiting access to benefits and financially exploiting clients. American medicine tends to be pathology and legal-risk-management oriented in that doctors are funded to find and treat illness and legally cover their asses. There are few cash bonuses for creatively enhancing patients' health.

All that being said, some people are crazier than others, and when you don't take responsibility for recognizing and healing your craziness, you tend to hurt the people closest to you—especially your family. My personal rule of thumb for a relationally/psychologically healthy person has less to do with the severity of their symptoms, and more to do with their commitment to grow and change. If you are willing to notice when you get distorted and *adjust* thought and behavior toward compassion and deeper understanding, you are by my definition a healthy person.

Remember the characteristics of defensive states? Amplified or numbed emotion, distorted perspectives, destructive impulses, and diminished capacities for empathy and self-awareness seem like they'd be easy to notice in ourselves, but they often aren't.

The first order of business in evaluating what's possible in a relationship is discerning what's possible in *you*. If *you're* willing to receive feedback on *your* defensive states, and self-regulate to states of healthy response to the present moment, then *you* might have what it takes to heal your marriage. If you can't self-regulate,

find a good therapist and learn how. It's not rocket science, but it is hard work.

Reason #94: Your affair makes it easier for your spouse to blame his or her defensive reactions on you. “Of course I went off on her. Any man would if his wife told him she was seeing another guy.” “What do you mean, ‘What’s my part of the pattern?’ He cheated on me!” As a veteran of countless such conversations, I tell you it’s easier to get someone to take responsibility for their defensive reactions when they haven’t been cheated on.

If you are committed to continual progress is such self-regulation, you’re going to want to know if your cheating spouse is willing and able to do the same. With both of you there are some common factors to look that weigh heavily on your chances of success.

Addiction.

Addiction is when some activity associated with pleasure is progressive and out of control. “Progressive” means that things get worse over time. “Out of control” means that—regularly—you lose your capacity to say no to your addiction.

Everybody is aware of alcoholism and drug addiction, but we can also be addicted to gambling (a common “gateway drug” to other addictions, especially for Asian Americans), sex, food, exercise, dieting, lying, and cheating. Whatever the addiction, if a spouse refuses to acknowledge a problem, the marriage is in a world of trouble.

Some maintain, “I can control my drinking (smoking, drugging, sexing, raging, etc)—and they sometimes are right. How do you discover you are out of control? I often suggest that someone observably limit—not eliminate—their substance for an extended period of time (this is obviously not the case for sexual acting out). “In control,” users can do this. It might be uncomfortable to limit alcohol, pot, food, or exercise, but some discover they can consistently do it. “Out of control” users cannot. They violate the rules they set for themselves and return to use without limits.

Discovering inability to consistently control use is often a bridge between denial and acknowledging addiction.

For example, alcoholics can't drink a maximum of three drinks a day for six months, or pot addicts can't limit themselves to using three days a week for six months. Both will inevitably rationalize their way into more extreme use—usually with seven days. Addicts can *stop* using their substance, but they can't use in a *controlled way*. When addicts acknowledge addiction, I encourage them to participate in one of the many recovery options available in addiction burdened American culture—AA, NA, SAA, twenty-eight day hospitalization programs, outpatient programs, support groups, etc.

I often suggest to spouses of addicts to set series of boundaries:

- Find an Alanon group and go to meetings. Alanon is for spouses, children, and other intimates of addicts, and it sends a powerful message to a user when you attend such meetings.
- Refuse to participate in denial. Look into your partner's eyes and say, "I know you are an addict, and I want you to get help."
- Refuse to codependently support the addiction. "I will not tell your boss you're sick instead of hung-over."
- Such boundaries progress toward versions of, "If you don't stop using and get into whatever recovery you need to stay sober, I won't live with you."

When someone is a *practicing* addict—meaning not acknowledging addiction and refusing to consider recovery—chances of successfully reconciling a conflicted marriage plummet.

When you or your cheating spouse is in the first year of recovery, where an addict is enormously self-absorbed and feels entitled to special consideration because of the struggle for sobriety, it is more difficult to work on an intimate relationship, but possible if both partners are willing.

Borderline and Narcissistic personality disorders.

In Chapter Five we discussed how people develop defenses through their emergent nervous systems automatically self-regulating in the face of threat. Everyone develops defenses of some sort because that's the price we pay for the gift of conscious self-awareness.

What I call “neurotic defenses” respond to external feedback and are consciously accessible to us if we cultivate a little self-awareness. Most of us will admit we are in a neurotic defensive state if challenged kindly and respectfully. “Keith, don't you think you're getting a little too worked up about how insurance companies are screwing over the country?” is one I've heard from my wife and kids, cuing me to reach for compassionate understanding. I tell myself, “Keith, calm down. There are lots of honest, well-meaning people in the insurance industry, and we do need gating and financial management processes for health care.” As I cultivate wiser, more compassionate perspectives, I calm down and have a clearer view of a complex set of issues.

“Characterological defenses” are those where external feedback progressively shuts us down or jacks us up. We resist—even refuse—self-examination and insight when pressed about our characterological defenses, and will get crazier and crazier until we attack or desert whoever is challenging us (or sometimes ourselves as in self-mutilation, or addictions).

Two common constellations of characterological defenses are borderline personality disorder and narcissistic personality disorder. In the last chapter we discussed borderline personality disorder of the *Fatal Attraction* variety. Borderline personality disorder involves frequent rage states, inability when stressed to consider other people's points of view, and compulsions to cling to and torture people we associate with our pain. Borderlines tend to feel like worthless, horrible people, and when in insight-oriented therapy delight in figuring out how messed up they are without acknowledging sadistic impulses and behaviors and actually

changing to become more self-aware and self-regulating. They respond best to treatment that focuses on shifting states of consciousness and how to self-regulate agonizing emotions and distorted perspectives.

Narcissists tend to feel entitled, superior, and more gifted and beautiful than others. They view others as objects to provide the “narcissistic supply” of admiration, strokes, and adoration. When challenged, narcissists tend to demean whoever is challenging them, and then withdraw—sometimes forever.

When upset, both narcissists and borderlines adamantly resist acknowledging their profoundly distorted states of consciousness.

If you or your spouse is a low functioning borderline or narcissist and is not actively acknowledging and changing destructive defensive tendencies, your chances of reconciliation go way down.

Abuse.

Physical abuse is pushing, shoving, striking, constraining, threatening, or physically hurting others for relief. Sexual abuse is coercing sexual contact from an unwilling or inappropriate partner. Emotionally abuse is chronically attacking, complaining, demeaning, nagging, criticizing, or threatening. All of these are especially despicable when inflicted on children. I believe every adult has responsibilities to protect and support children.

I won't work with physical or sexual abusers, and especially those who abuse children. I don't care how messed up your childhood was, or how badly injured you were, there is just no excuse for abusing children. When they come my way, I refer such clients to therapists who can be more understanding and patient with these kinds of problems.

If you are the perpetrator or the victim of abuse, get into therapy and start setting limits (for yourself if you're the abuser, on your partner if he or she is the abuser). If a child is involved, protect him or her *now*, which means getting institutions like the

police and Child Protective Services involved if a child is being physically or sexually abused.

If your cheating spouse is abusing you or your kids and does not *actively* and *publicly* (meaning including other people like therapists and groups) immediately enter treatment, you have little chance of successfully recovering from an affair. In this case, I suggest—if you still want to ultimately reconcile—that you unilaterally separate and tell your spouse to get into individual treatment, and—if they maintain the work for at least four to twelve weeks—you’ll consider marriage counseling.

I know all of the above sounds severe, but we need to take abuse seriously. Abraham Maslow was a famous developmentalist who is mostly known for his work with transcendence and exploring human potential. Lesser known is his understanding of the dialectics of human development where we need to integrate our primitive instincts and programming with our yearnings to transcend. He said that any psychology that didn’t take into account both our “creatureliness”—our capacities to act impulsively and destructively, and our “Godlikeness”—our capacities for transcendent love, caring, and unity, was an incomplete psychology.

To some extent, all defenses—which involve destructive impulses—have violent components. Arguably, dealing with our tendencies towards violence *is* the human problem. Physical/sexual abuse, and extreme emotional abuse are forms of violence that are orders of magnitude more severe than the everyday nastiness or crabbiness we all regularly encounter. They have to be directly addressed and healed for any marriage—especially one wounded by infidelity—to thrive.

So, my spouse and I are reconciling, we’re taking responsibility for our defenses, and we have a shared zero-tolerance for abuse. Now what?

Now you commit to love and development and *be patient*. As I explained in Chapter Five, when we’re securely attached

(knowing, accepting, and protecting) with ourselves, others, and spirit, we naturally evolve. You and your spouse now need to learn and practice how to *steadily and consistently* better know, accept, and protect yourselves and each other to promote an expanding love emotionally, spiritually, romantically, and erotically.

Find therapists that you both like and respect, and get to work. Make progress. Celebrate progress. Eventually, identify your marriage as a relationship where love expands and deepens over time. If you both commit to this process, eventually the secret affair will be a distant memory signaling a traumatic but seminal time when you both turned away from betrayal and chaos towards intimacy and love.

CHAPTER NINE: TURN TRAUMAS INTO INITIATIONS

I think we've established that affairs involve a period of fun for two people accompanied by a world of suffering for everyone involved—including those two people. That being said, the meaning of trauma is determined by how it is processed and incorporated into our life stories, our autobiographical narratives.

Brains carry fluid stories of our lives—especially in the right hemisphere which monitors events/experiences for emotional relevance and strings them together through association and anticipation. These right-hemisphere-based stories are autobiographical narratives, starting biochemically at conception, but only coming into conscious awareness at five or six as your brain—especially the memory-organizing-and-encoding hippocampus—matures. At six you can understand yourself at the center of a life story you direct to some extent—an autobiographical narrative. Attachment researchers have found that relationally healthy individuals have what are called “coherent, autonomous attachment styles” involving autobiographical narratives which make sense to them in positive ways.

Coherent, autonomous, autobiographical narratives both make sense and seem available for influence and change. We feel we are directing the vehicle of our life in positive, love/life affirming directions consistent with our values—in ways that meet our beautiful, good, and true validity standards. Individuals with such autobiographical narratives are more likely to have secure/healthy intimate relationships, be more self-reflective and empathetic, and be more flexible in thought and behavior.

Reason #95: Your secret affair will injure your family members' autobiographical narratives. Your spouse might lose a sense of security that was simply a given before your affair. Also, some spouses and children never return to a felt sense of the world as safe after the shock of infidelity.

Peggy.

Peggy was an attractive, pleasant woman, dedicated wife and mother, who was plunged into a depressed, preoccupied autobiographical narrative when her husband, Will, cheated on her. She concluded he strayed because he fell in love with his paramour and didn't love her. His sexual betrayal restimulated her childhood trauma of an uncle repetitively molesting her. In therapy, she unconsciously fought processing the restimulations from Will's affair every step of the way. Her lament in sessions was, “I want the life I had before he cheated,” and she believed everything had been fine up to that point. She distorted any new insight, behavior, or idea that arose from processing the affair into feeling further savaged by the whole process. She felt a victim of her

circumstances, and didn't think she had much power to change the current horrible story of her marriage.

Fortunately for both of them, Peggy was willing to tough it out. She entered individual therapy, and actively participated in marriage counseling—though she often left sessions furious at me for pointing to her part of relational defensive patterns. As years passed, Will became clearer, more self-reflective, and better at relating to her when she was open, and handling her when she collapsed into despairing/raging defensive states. Peggy began to value the new perspectives and openness that emerged as they examined how their individual and collective lives had led to the affair trauma. After years of treatment she finally admitted—reluctantly—that she and Will had become wiser and deeper. As I suggested to them in our very first session, the answer to their trauma was to resolve it to become wiser and more able to love than before. Their autobiographical narratives of their marriage—shaken to the core by the affair—needed to reorganize into more coherent form through courageous self-exploration and change.

Reason 96: Your affair can stunt your spouse's growth by providing an eternal, credible excuse for blaming you. *“Sure I had too much to drink. Maybe if you hadn't cheated on me, I wouldn't have to drown my sorrows.” “Don't ask me to change my tone. You cheated on me!” I could go on and on. Most growth systems focus us on our personal responsibilities and powers in any given moment. Hopelessly blaming others for our pain blinds us to our own abilities to refine and enhance our life stories and ways of being in the world.*

Affairs signal wounds and blind spots in our personal universes and in our most intimate relationship. Each of us can decide to heal wounds and bring blind spots into awareness. This is *always* a good idea, and doesn't require anybody else's decisions and work—in other words, we can heal from an affair whether our partner cooperates or not.

If you decide to heal and grow while your spouse refuses therapy and self-awareness, it doesn't bode well for your marriage. It is an axiom of therapy that if one partner works on growing and developing while the other does not, marital difficulties accelerate, often to divorce. Still, humans are genetically programmed to self-transcend—it is one of a number of temperamental qualities we all have to some extent—and, if we are challenged to grow by either our own yearning or by traumas such as secret affairs, we suffer if we don't answer the call.

My favorite outcome in resolving an affair is for each partner to address individual and relational issues to create a superior marriage of enhanced intimacy, passion, trust, and joy. This superior relationship is characterized by increasing safety,

transparency, and flexibility. In other words, healthy people open more, hide less, and adjust to love in the face of conflict. This requires both partners using tremendous amounts of self-awareness and self-regulation simultaneously in threatening situations when nervous systems are mobilizing defensive states. In defensive states, inclinations are to attack or withdraw more than to self-observe, self-disclose, listen, and accept.

The obvious point here is that we can resolve affairs if we grow to feel wiser, more beautiful, and more able to love. Trauma is not my favorite way to grow, but if trauma happens, I know what resolves it—courageous inquiry, thought, and action leading to personal transformations, greater compassion, deeper consciousness, and more love and intimacy.

Such transformative initiation from resolving affairs can happen for individuals and couples. I want everybody to grow and transcend. Spouses, lovers, children, friends, and extended family can and should learn and expand from their own and each other's victories and mistakes. It's particularly beautiful to see this happen with a couple. Committed partners mutually enhancing intimacy, passion, and spiritual growth are embodiments of the tantric ideal—people loving each other open to pure Spirit.

Practically, the central set of interior and social skills necessary for accomplishing the above is knowing the difference between relating and handling, and becoming expert in both.

Relating and handling.

There is a huge difference between relating with someone and handling him or her. Relating is simply two or more people telling the truth and listening for the truth with the mutual intent of greater intimacy and growth. Socially competent people value and prefer relating, know how to relate, and know how to tell when they or someone else can't relate. When relating isn't possible, socially competent people know how to handle themselves and others in service of the highest good.

Relating looks easy. Two or more people open up intimately with interest and acceptance, and share easily, generating enjoyable intimacy, expanded perspectives, and collaborative problem solving. Nobody gets offended for very long. Injuries are met with automatic repair. Mutual respect, honesty, and acceptance is assumed, and if someone enters a defensive state, they feel a sense of responsibility to notice and adjust to a state of healthy response to the present moment—often while apologizing to the other for the intrusion of the amplified or numbed emotions, distorted perspectives, destructive impulses, and diminished capacities for empathy and self-reflection.

Most self-help guides to better relationships have endless descriptions of what relating looks like, how to do it, and what techniques have been particularly inspiring for the authors. People relating well is a beautiful dance of mutual attunements, with emotion and thought rising and falling in collaborative crescendos and decrescendos of intrapersonal and interpersonal harmonics. People who have experienced the magic of healthy marital relating are inspired to share this precious relational style with others through books, articles, and classes. What is often missed in such work is acknowledgement of how absorbing and persuasive defensive states are in blocking relating, and the necessity for figuring out when relating isn't working and then shifting to handling.

Reason #97: Secret affairs corrupt both relating and handling.

You feel like you're relating with your secret lover, while really avoiding the elephant in the living room—your transgressive, selfish, ultimately unsustainable secret relationship. You feel like you're handling your spouse, but not because they can't relate, but rather because you refuse to tell the truth.

Happy couples are genius relaters. Each spouse maintains gratitude for life, partner, family, and world. They seek each other out to share insights and experiences, expecting interest and support. They monitor their interior landscapes, and self-regulate disharmony to harmony without causing unnecessary suffering for themselves or others. All this interior self-regulation leaves effective relaters appearing deceptively relaxed and socially competent. “Deceptively,” because they make it look so easy to be socially engaged and appropriately connected in wildly diverse situations.

“Handling” is what you do when whomever you're speaking with can't relate. Say you're married to Sam, a nice guy who goes crazy when his power tools are misplaced. Sam discovers your son Josh borrowed a router and didn't put it back in the right spot. Sam can't find his router, and blows up *at you*. He starts to rave about how irresponsible Josh is, how he'll never lend his tools out again, and how he should have known better than to...blah, blah, blah. You can tell he is too upset to consider there might be another side to the story, and know if you suggest he calms down, that *you* are likely to become the target.

So, you handle him. “I know it's upsetting when Josh borrows your tools. He does need to be more responsible. I know you love your router.” Sam relaxes as you validate him and agree with him. You are not being transparent at this point, because you really think he's overreacting and is too upset to consider it. Your goal becomes soothing him enough that you can actually have a real, grown-up conversation about the issue. At some point—when Sam calms down enough to actually have a dialogue—you shift to

relating, as in, “You seem to get extra angry when Josh doesn’t seem to remember how much you value your tools.”

Most parents instinctively understand relating and handling. Kids of all ages after around two can have coherent conversations, but also easily shift into primitive states where they can’t respond to reason, affection, or confrontation. When your four-year-old throws a temper tantrum, you constrain him gently but firmly until he lowers his arousal enough to relate. Similarly, if he’s too tired to keep his eyes open, you stop trying to converse and start looking for a place to put him down for a nap. If your nine-year-old refuses to wear her coat to school on a freezing day, you send her to her room until she shifts states enough to realize how cold it is outside. If your sixteen-year-old collapses into hysterical tears because her boyfriend is an hour late, or your seventeen-year-old son tells you how full of it you are for not letting him break the law by driving his friends during the first six months of his driver's license, you set your boundaries and wait to discuss the issues when they’ve calmed down enough to relate.

Parents accept the responsibilities of handling kids who can’t/won’t relate, but lovers—conditioned as we are from six to eighteen months of romantic infatuation where everything is *so* easy—expect to always be able to relate. As lovers we tend to be offended if our partner can’t relate, and often blame him or her when *we* can’t relate. Most of us, when we’re upset, resist to some extent taking on the responsibilities of self-regulation, discernment, and healthy relating and handling.

In general, the more mature we are, the better able we become at relating and handling.

Progressive awakening to our responsibilities and abilities to relate and handle mark our progress on lots of developmental lines. Morally we see how what is “right” in a situation is affected by how present and responsible we are. Interpersonally, we tend to take more responsibility for serving the highest good in each interaction, whether that involves being transparently honest,

setting firm boundaries, or deescalating a charged situation when others are unable or unwilling to do the same.

The happiest couples get better at relating and handling throughout their life together. They take their own and each other's needs and yearnings seriously without getting lost in rigid rules or defensive states. They consciously expand love, and do what it takes to resolve trauma into growth.

Reason #98: Secret affairs slow a system's relational growth.

Every member of a family system influences all others. Tolerating lies wounds people and makes them more cynical, but revealing sexual secrets can also provoke family attacks. These shadowy dynamics slow family members' development.

Susan in Chapter Two was a relatively immature thirty-three year old woman when she first came to me, suffering emotionally and physically from her secret affair. Throughout the next several years as she ended the affair, revealed her secret life to her husband David, and they worked to reestablish trust and deepen intimacy, a beautiful thing happened. They matured and grew.

David took his responsibilities as a husband more seriously, and began to crave children, finding—somewhat to his surprise—that it mattered a lot him if Susan was on board for starting a family. He smoked less pot, attuned better to Susan’s emotional rhythms, and was less patient with his friends who cheated on their wives or partied like they were still college students. Always an effective worker, David took his business up a couple of notches in how he organized his work and managed his resources.

Susan increasingly realized she had historically regulated her anxiety and depression with romantic yearnings and obsessions, and decided she wanted to create a solid marriage and family with David. She learned to address her anxiety/depression issues for what they were, defensive patterns begun at birth and expanded through development. She went from being partly in the David/Susan shared universe, to fully committing to family life. She wanted David in the room with her during the births of their sons, and—as their boys developed—Susan and David became active, interested, self-aware parents, providing much better attunements to their kids than their parents—growing up as they had done during the relatively emotionally autistic American 1940’s and 1950’s—had been able to provide.

As they woke up to increasing levels of compassion and depth of consciousness, neither Susan nor David blamed their parents much for the defensive patterns imprinted in their nervous systems. They realized each generation of parents does the best they can with the tools they've got. On the other hand, they both took on the responsibilities of acting compassionately and wisely with parents, siblings, and extended family, discerning when they could relate with other family members, and handling them when necessary. As the boys grew, Susan and David *consciously* guided the family in forming a tiny little support culture that encouraged all four to grow in social competence and personal integrity.

Reason #99: We can grow so the “me” of my current worldview looks with compassion on the mistakes of the “he” of my past worldviews. Worldviews change as we grow. The “me” of my current worldview becomes the “he” of my next worldview years from now. I’ll look back on Keith as a guy who “Used to believe...” and “Now believes...something different.” Deepening consciousness and greater compassion make these progressive worldviews more beautiful, good, and true, and guide us to authentic inner authority.

Maturity is not an end state. It is a lifelong process of progressive awakening and self-regulation, accepting there is always more to be learned, further awakenings to welcome. This attitude makes it easier to catch and correct defensive states, to reach for relating first in our social contacts, and to gracefully handle when necessary.

Flirtations, distracting attractions, and secret affairs, disorienting and disorganizing as they are, break up old patterns, creating opportunities for new, more mature patterns to be cultivated. As new patterns form through courageous self-examination and action, the subsequent growth and transformations can lead us to deeper consciousness and expanding compassion. These changes are transformative initiations.

Reason #100: 100 Reasons to NOT Have the Secret Affair: and what to do if one shows up in your life. Unless Reason #100 is the first thing you've read in this book, you've by now encountered an awful lot of information about how we love, cheat, and struggle to love better. Any experience—including secret affairs—can be processed into expansion and growth. This is one of my favorite miracles of self-aware consciousness and human evolution. That being said, secret affairs are singularly painful and dangerous growth opportunities, and tend to hurt lots of people—especially the lovers themselves. Be honest with yourself and your spouse. Direct your will and courage towards deeper love and passion within your marriage. In the long run it's the healthiest for everyone and—believe it or not—the most fun, joy, and passion for you.

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