

ISSUE 2: AFFILIATION & DESIRE: Love & rejection

The second major area of concern for couples may seem obvious to you, but as we shall be discovering, its enactment in relationship is not as simple as it seems. This issue is the level of affiliation or attachment exhibited in the relationship. Our need to receive displays of affection, love, intimacy, soothing, and positive displays of bonding are a defining characteristic of intimate relationships. These active displays of love form the character of romantic, sexual, and intimate relationships.

Attachment theory.

Just like the issue of control goes from one extreme of controlling someone to the other of setting them free, the issue of affiliation lies on a continuum from one extreme of active love and moving toward the other to the other extreme of rejecting, attacking, and pushing away the other. The two extremes are this:

REJECTION----- ACTIVE LOVING

This dimension to human loving can also be described in terms of closeness and distance like this

DISTANCE-----CLOSENESS

So you can consider the degree to which your partner is close to you as running from one extreme of showing affection and tenderness in an active and loving way to its opposite of rejecting, attacking, and pushing you away. Active love and closeness includes such things as showing tenderness, approaching the other with care, showing physical signs of affection, wanting to be close, showing a gentle care for the other, etc. The other extreme includes extreme attacks, being abusive, rejecting and hurting the other, blaming the other, pushing him/her away, putting him/her down in subtle ways, being negative and critical about the other, etc.

Most people do not want the latter to happen as part of their relationship but in its everyday imperfect and earthy realism, this happens a lot in relationships. Most couples who declare a love for their partner are also guilty of pushing them away or attacking them in some way.

Every couple I have worked with talks about this issue as a central struggle in their relationship. It is characterized by such statements as “He is so distant”; “She is cold and unaffectionate”; “I need more closeness in the relationship”; “We rarely show any affection”; “I just need some attention and affection, I feel ignored”; “He attacks me verbally and puts me down”; “I feel so hurt by her constant rejections”; “He is so distant”, “He shows no interest”, “I have no feelings”, “She is always wanting from me”, “He is always pulling away”, “I feel smothered by her” “I need some distance and space from him”; etc.

So figuring out how much emotional distance and closeness there is going to be in a relationship is very much the dance of intimacy? To what degree is one expected to display acts of positive affection and love and to what degree should one be permitted

to display acts of rejection and distancing? Now the thing about relationships is that, as with control, we have to cope with the fact that each of our needs for closeness are not always compatible. In fact you might suggest that there is going to be an inevitable incompatibility which gets resolved through negotiation, regulation, distance, closeness, or conflict.

Marriage is often caricatured as a relationship where women seek considerable more closeness than their male partners. While, inversely, men are caricatured as seeking more distance than their female partners. While there is some truth to this, it is rarely as simple. As you can imagine, finding the right balance is critical and not easy. In fact, like control, the balancing act is a life long challenge. “How much space should I give him” and “Should I pursue him for affection or let him withdraw as he wishes” are dilemmas in both courting and aging couples, in couples with good relationships and distressed ones.

Some people often assume that displays of affection and love are all that matter in a relationship. This is often only the case in early romantic love but as a relationship develops the issues of control/freedom and commitment/responsibility assume equal importance.

So, we can conclude that each person comes into a relationship with a set emotional belief about:

- The amount of affection they can expect to get and give,
- The amount of rejection they can expect to give and get.

Without some exceptions, people tend to expect more than they give.

Desire:

In very simple terms, unless each partner wants the other in terms of desire, it is very difficult for a relationship to go anywhere. However, one of the central difficulties in relationship is when one, or both partners, pretend to have commitment and desire. This is very common. When this happens one partner has lost the desire to be with the other, has lost the desire to want to be close to the other, AND INDIRECTLY PUSHES THE OTHER AWAY but disguises this and blames the other partner for it.

Frequently in my work with couples I have to isolate this issue separate from other issues and, in the cold light, challenge the person to take responsibility for it.

HOW MUCH CLOSENESS AND DISTANCE DO YOU GET		Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Mostly
	SETS FREE					
1	My partner gives me the freedom to have a separate life.					
2	My partner leaves me free to do and be whatever I think best.	1	2	3	4	5
3	My partner gives me the emotional space to be apart and separate.	1	2	3	4	5
	IS SEPARATE					
4	My partner freely does do his/her own thing separate from me.	1	2	3	4	5
5	My partner has a real sense of who he is separate from me.	1	2	3	4	5
6	My partner does not burden me with his/her neediness or dependency.	1	2	3	4	5
	GIVES ENCOURAGEMENT					
7	My partner encourages me in everyday life to be the person I am meant to be.	0	1	2	3	4
8	When I am down or stressed my partner helps me to feel good about myself.	0	1	2	3	4
9	My partner knows my goals and dreams and encourages me to pursue them.	0	1	2	3	4
	SELF-DISCLOSES					
10	My partner is straightforward, truthful, and clear in his communications with me.	0	1	2	3	4
11	My partner freely and openly talks with me about his innermost self.	0	1	2	3	4
12	My partner is happy and very open with me, expressing him/herself in a warm and friendly manner.	0	1	2	3	4
	ACTIVELY LOVES					
13	My partner gently loves me without asking for anything in return.	1	0	1	2	3
14	With a sense of happiness, my partner lovingly approaches me just as I am.	1	0	1	2	3
15	With loving tenderness my partner connects affectionately and sexually with me when I need it.	1	0	1	2	3
	JOYFULLY RESPONDS					
16	My partner relaxes, lets go, and is delighted to be with me.	1	0	1	2	3
17	My partner lovingly and happily responds to my gestures of affection.	1	0	1	2	3
18	My is attentive to me and takes care of my needs.	1	0	1	2	3
	TRUSTINGLY ACCEPTS					
19	My partner comfortably accepts my help and care giving.	2	1	0	1	2
20	My partner willingly accepts and goes along with my suggestions and ideas.	2	1	0	1	2
21	My partner comfortably takes advice and guidance from me.	2	1	0	1	2
	WILLINGLY RESPECTS					
22	My partner willingly carries his responsibilities in the relationship ensuring it is equitable and fair.	2	1	0	1	2
23	My partner is respectful toward me and treats me as an equal.	2	1	0	1	2
24	My partner thinks I am fine just as I am.	2	1	0	1	2
	ASSERTIVELY INFLUENCES					
25	In a good-natured way my partner checks on me to remind me of things that need to be done.	3	2	1	0	1
26	My partner influences me positively by telling me what to do, how to be, or what to say.	3	2	1	0	1

27	When necessary my partner takes charge of things and can direct me in a confident manner.	3	2	1	0	1
	ACCEPTS INFLUENCE					
28	My partner listens to what I say and willingly does what I ask.	3	2	1	0	1
29	My partner willingly changes his ways to do what he thinks I want.	3	2	1	0	1
30	My partner comfortably surrenders and gives in to me without undue hassle.	3	2	1	0	1
	ACTIVELY CONTROLS					
31	My partner tries to make me follow his/her rules and ideas of what is right and proper.	4	3	2	1	0
32	My partner controls me in a matter-of-fact way and has a habit of taking charge of everything.	4	3	2	1	0
33	My partner thinks he/she knows what is best for me so tells me exactly what to do or think.	4	3	2	1	0
	SURRENDERS					
34	My partner depends on me for every little thing.	4	3	2	1	0
35	My partner mindlessly or helplessly needs me to do things my way	4	3	2	1	0
36	My partner leaves everything to me by just giving in.	4	3	2	1	0