

Chapter Three

The Revolutionary New Science of Love as an Attachment Bond

Chapter three offers an experiential felt sense of adult romantic love as an attachment bond, similar to the bond that exists between infant and parent. Threats to an attachment bond are viewed as the element that casts romantic love in peril. I answer the questions, “How is romantic love an attachment process?” and “How does attachment theory provide a clearly articulated theory and science of adult love?”

My intention in this chapter is to immerse the reader in an attachment view of adult love that helps you him/her to discover how attachment theory serves EFT clinicians as a reliable and active guide from the first session with a couple through the entire change process.

I end the chapter by examining roadblocks commonly encountered by therapists seeking to internalize attachment theory as a guiding paradigm for couple therapy.

To *taste* the theme of this chapter, you may enjoy experimenting with the accompanying exercise on framing couple interactions with attachment themes and images. The attachment frames, help an EFT therapist to engage with the core issues and process rather getting distracted by the presenting content.

You will also enjoy the attached excerpt of a talk by Dr. P. Shaver, on the interconnection of attachment, caregiving and sex, with the anecdote of Nobel physicist Richard Feynman’s letter to his wife two years after she died.

Exercise on Attachment Framing

an exercise for you to do alone or in a peer study group

Within an attachment frame, the most bizarre behaviors make sense, and good intentions and underlying attachment fears and needs emerge. In this exercise you are to **create attachment frames and images** to validate and normalize the seemingly excessive over and under-reactions of partners to one another. This includes difficult behaviors and negative cycles (demanding, pursuing, hostile, critical, withdrawing, distancing, utterly nonresponsive, defensive reactions).

- Two participants, briefly (3 minutes or less) role play interaction in the first couple or if you are alone, imagine specific interactions between partners.
- Identify attachment themes, attachment language and images.
- Move out of the content into an attachment frame of what is happening. (That is, take note of behaviors likely to cue experiences of abandonment or rejection.)
- Reframe the difficult behavior through an attachment lens. (How the specific behaviors and actions are strategies for safe engagement and coping with attachment fears).
- Repeat with the second case.

Case Examples*

1. George and Dianne, married for 32 years, with 5 children, battle over George's occasional unemployment as a social worker, a past history of alcohol abuse, and his currently heavy involvement in AA. Dianne's bouts of depression and high blood pressure have endured for years. George accuses Dianne of infidelity, which she denies. As a bank executive, she works long hours. They have bitter escalating conflicts and sometimes go for days without talking.

2. There is growing distance between gay partners Jay and Dino, married only a few months, struggling with homophobic rejection from Dino's family. Dino pressures Jay to visit his family to try to build a relationship with them; Jay is reluctant to visit – especially since their last big fight – which happened just as Jay received his HIV positive diagnosis. He came home to share it with Dino, but before sharing it with him, they got caught up in an argument about visiting Dino's family, and he hasn't shared it yet. Jay says, "You never seem happy with me — you just want more and more from me — I feel like I am never "the guy" for you — I need to feel someone wants me for who I am, not only if I change."

Main attachment themes**

1. Abandonment, loss, and aloneness: fears of finding the other unavailable and unresponsive.
2. Rejection and feeling devalued or seen as inadequate by the other: feeling unworthy or unlovable in partner's eyes.
3. Lack of caring and support: doubting that one would come first, that one can count on one's partner, being overwhelmed by stress, on one's own.
4. Feeling that you do not exist in the mind of the other – as though one is peripheral and dispensable.

Examples of attachment images

A frozen wasteland; outside an ice castle; drowning with no one to save me; clawing my way up a steep cliff with no toe holds; calling into an empty cavern, hearing only the echo of my voice; hitting the ball over and over but never getting to first base.

*Cases from:

Brubacher, L. and Johnson, S. (2017). Romantic love as an attachment process: Shaping secure bonds. In J. Fitzgerald (Ed.), *Foundations for couples' therapy: Research for the real world* (p.8-19). New York, NY: Routledge

**Attachment Themes from:

Johnson, S. M., Bradley, B., Furrow, J., Lee, A., Palmer, G., Tilley, D., & Woolley, S. (2005). *Becoming an Emotionally Focused Couple Therapist: The Workbook*. New York, NY: Routledge, (p. 28).