

[Transcript] Huberman Lab / GUEST SERIES | Dr. Paul Conti: How to Build and Maintain Healthy Relationships

Welcome to the Huberman Lab guest series where I and an expert guest discuss science and science-based tools for everyday life.

I'm Andrew Huberman and I'm a professor of neurobiology and ophthalmology at Stanford School of Medicine.

Today marks the third episode in our four episode series about mental health with Dr. Paul Conti.

Today's episode deals with the topic of healthy relationships, how to define what a healthy relationship is,

and how to achieve healthy relationships of all kinds including romantic relationships, interpersonal relationships at work,

friendships with family, and of course with oneself.

This episode builds on the framework of the psychology of self and mental health that was established in the first and second episodes of this series.

However, even if you didn't listen to the first or second episode in this series,

today's episode will still contain a lot of information and protocols that you will find valuable for improving your relationships.

That said, if you have the opportunity to listen to the first and second episodes in this series,

I think you'll find those to be tremendously beneficial at any point.

During today's episode, Dr. Conti discusses what makes for a successful relationship of any kind as well as tools to improve those relationships.

He discusses various types of bonds including healthy bonds and trauma bonds,

not just in the context of romantic relationship but in the context of all types of relationships.

We also discuss different challenges that people face in relationships including abusive relationships and we discuss the role of power dynamics, anxiety, and boundaries in relationships

both from the perspective of unhealthy relationships but more importantly from the understanding and protocols to cultivate healthy relationships.

While there is an abundance of opinions and information out there on the internet these days about relationships both healthy and unhealthy,

today's discussion approaches the topic of relationships through an entirely different lens

which is the lens of the self in terms of one's conscious and subconscious mind

and how multiple conscious and subconscious minds through different individuals

interact with one another in ways that we can see and ways that we can't see

and all of that framed within the actionable steps that any of us can take to improve our relationship to ourselves and to others.

Before we begin, I'd like to emphasize that this podcast is separate from my teaching and research roles at Stanford.

It is, however, part of my desire and effort to bring zero cost to consumer information about science and science-related tools to the general public.

In keeping with that theme, I'd like to thank the sponsors of today's podcast.

Our first sponsor is BetterHelp.

BetterHelp offers professional therapy with a licensed therapist carried out all online.

I've been doing therapy for more than 30 years.

While I confess that initially I was forced to do that therapy as a condition for being let back into high school,

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over time, I learned that therapy is a tremendously valuable practice.

In fact, I consider doing regular weekly therapy as just as important as doing regular physical exercise in order to improve one's health.

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as well as somebody with whom you can have excellent rapport

and that can help you arrive at positively transformative insights that you wouldn't have otherwise had.

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Again, that's BetterHelp, H-E-L-P dot com slash Huberman.

Today's episode is also brought to us by Waking Up.

Waking Up is a meditation app that offers dozens of guided meditation sessions, mindfulness trainings, yoga-needra sessions, and more.

By now, there's an abundance of data showing that even short daily meditations can greatly improve our mood, reduce anxiety,

improve our ability to focus, and can improve our memory.

And while there are many different forms of meditation, most people find it difficult to find and stick to a meditation practice

in a way that is most beneficial for them.

The Waking Up app makes it extremely easy to learn how to meditate and to carry out your daily meditation practice

in a way that's going to be most effective and efficient for you.

It includes a variety of different types of meditations of different duration, as well as things like yoga-needra,

which place the brain and body into a sort of pseudo-sleep that allows you to emerge feeling incredibly mentally refreshed.

In fact, the science around yoga-needra is really impressive, showing that after a yoga-needra session,

levels of dopamine in certain areas of the brain are enhanced by up to 60%,

which places the brain and body into a state of enhanced readiness for mental work and for physical work.

Another thing I really like about the Waking Up app is that it provides a 30-day introduction course.

So for those of you that have not meditated before or are getting back to a meditation practice, that's fantastic.

Or if you're somebody who's already a skilled and regular meditator, Waking Up has more advanced meditations and yoga-needra sessions for you as well.

If you'd like to try the Waking Up app, you can go to WakingUp.com slash Huberman and access a free 30-day trial.

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And now for my discussion about mental health with Dr. Paul Conti.

Dr. Conti, welcome back.

Thank you. Happy to be here.

Today we're going to discuss relationships, and that will often focus on romantic relationships, but also relationships between friends, between family members, and inevitably the relationship to self,

which is what we really focused on in episodes one and two of this series.

Episode one being all the things that go into a healthy self

and how to understand what is unhealthy and healthy in all of us

and make adjustments to the unhealthy aspects of our unconscious and conscious through really specific proactive behaviors and patterns of thought.

So really a roadmap to these ideals that we call mental health and understanding of the self.

Today we want to talk about relationships from the perspective of, of course, how people relate, but I have a feeling it's going to have something to do with, or perhaps almost everything to do with, our relationship to understanding ourselves first.

Yes.

So just to make sure that we're all on the same page, regardless of whether or not people have seen episodes one and two,

and certainly people do not need to have seen or listened to episodes one and two of this series in order to understand today's discussion.

Could you please tell us what is a healthy person,

and how can we ask ourselves the sorts of questions that allow us to determine whether or not we are healthy

and where to look in terms of making adjustments if we want to be healthier than we already are, which I have to believe almost everybody, if not everybody,

certainly wants to be the healthiest and best expression of themselves

so that they can do the most for themselves and for others in the world.

So the linchpin of it all is the agency and gratitude as verbs.

That's the top of the mountain.

There's a lot of climbing we do to get to the top of the mountain.

Once we're over the top of the mountain, then things are in a better place.

And even though they're two words, agency is of course a word, gratitude is a word, but it doesn't mean that they're separate concepts.

Approaching the world through the lens of agency and gratitude,

thought of as one thing because they come together and they come together as verbs.

That's what we're aiming for, because that's the thing that we can work towards.

If you think about what comes underneath of that,

it takes us back to the two pillars and the ten cupboards,

and if we're looking in there enough, we're mining.

What is in my unconscious mind I might not be aware of?

Let me generate some curiosity about my defense mechanisms and my character structure and think about what's salient inside of me.

If we're doing all of that, then what we're doing, we're building empowerment,

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we're building humility, and then ultimately the expression of all of that is the agency and gratitude. And it's something that we can't have enough of.

Like I said, what's the best amount of that, the most that's possible?

Because we're going to engage in the world in the healthiest way, because agency and gratitude doesn't mean we're happy about everything.

If there's something negative and we can change that, then we don't feel happy about that.

The sense of gratitude in me makes me more likely to feel that I can change that

or to take the chance of trying to change that,

and then the agency part of that concept can come more to the fore and I can make the change.

So it's not about bliss, it's not about forgiving self and others for all sorts of things and not working to make better.

It's about being in the world and being as aware as I can possibly be,

including being aware that there are things I'm not aware of.

So having a healthy respect and an orientation to the world that values truth and values understanding and exploration,

if we do all of that, then we reach the top of the mountain through the agency and gratitude.

And then what builds upon that or what comes from that is the peace, the contentment, the delight, the generative drive being strengthened, like that all comes together.

And then the aggressive, or we say aggressive because that's a traditional term,

but the aggressive or the assertive, the assertiveness or assertion drive.

However, whatever word we want to put to that, that drive exists in us in a way that subserves the generative drive.

The same thing with the pleasure drive in us.

It exists in us, but it's subserving the generative drive and then all those good things come together and they come together to help us be as healthy as we can and to stay healthy,

including when tribulation or difficulties come our way so that we stay as best we can in the agency and gratitude as verbs.

And again, there's nothing theoretical about this.

It's a way to live and there are a lot of people who live some of their lives or parts of their lives through that,

and we can aspire to it and we can work towards it.

And if we're the best that we can be, then we're going to be in our relationships the best we can be.

Like you and I have a relationship.

We know each other.

We're working together.

If I can bring my best self to you, to thinking about you, to understanding you,

if I can bring the agency and the gratitude, then I'm going to do right by you.

I'm going to mentalize this idea of thinking about what's going on inside of you.

Like I'm going to bring the best of all of that.

And then because we have a relationship, there's also an us.

Like there's a me, there's a you.

There's something that happens between us.

That's the relationship.

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And I will also bring my best self to that thing that is no longer just me or just you, but that isn't us. And that applies to all relationships.

You can apply that to seeking health in every single relationship in our lives.

What you're saying really speaks to the importance of people taking a real look at themselves, which is not necessarily an inventory of self in the typical sense that we're used to hearing it.

But rather through this lens or map of the self that was spelled out in episodes one and two.

And again, for those that are just joining the series now, the map, as we're referring to it, is available as a downloadable PDF in the show note captions.

If people want to get that, it's completely zero cost.

You can just go there and access it or just view it on a screen, print it out, whatever you like.

You certainly don't need to do that because here again, we're talking about the core elements of that map,

which, if I understand correctly, arrive eventually at a set of verb states that we're calling agency and gratitude.

Those are not separate, as you pointed out. They work together.

You described it as on top of the geyser, right?

And I really like that.

Like there's a lot of things going on, but then it all uplifts to something, right?

And if we're doing it in the right way, in the diligent way, then it is like a geyser.

And what it's lifting up on top of it is the agency and gratitude.

I love, you put those words to it, and I think it captures it really profoundly.

Well, the stuff that geysers up perhaps deserves a bit of our attention just for a few moments.

You described these two pillars that I described as geysering up to agency and gratitude in the best circumstances.

But the best circumstances we want to remind ourselves and everybody are attainable by looking at what's in those pillars.

Those two pillars are the structure of self, so really understanding something about the structure of self.

So that includes some understanding of the unconscious mind, some understanding of the conscious mind,

defense mechanisms, character structure, and self that was all reviewed and described in episodes one and two,

as well as the functions of self, which are more of the verb states, the expressions of the structure of self,

self-awareness in the first of those, defense mechanisms in action.

And here I'd be remiss if I didn't tell myself and everybody else again that defense mechanisms are not always bad.

There can be healthy defense mechanisms.

Absolutely.

They can protect us in very valuable ways.

And then this notion of salience, what we pay attention to, you know,

what sorts of scripts are going on in our head about ourselves and others?

What are we paying attention to?

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How are we interpreting those in our head and to others?

And then most importantly, perhaps to ourselves.

And then our actual behaviors.

What are we doing from the time we wake up until the time we go to sleep at night?

And then our strivings, our sense of hopefulness or perhaps lack of strivings.

And there I'm reminded also that nobody does all of these things perfectly all the time.

We all have elements within us that perhaps are not serving to geysers up into agency and gratitude as well as they could.

But that all of us have the capacity to look at these two pillars and these 10 things that were just listed off as you described them as

cupboards that we look into and examine and think about.

And that if we can do that with a skilled clinician like yourself or another psychiatrist or psychologist, terrific.

But even if we don't have access to that, that we can examine within us what is and is not serving to geysers up into agency and gratitude.

We can bring any issue of self to those two pillars and the 10 cupboards within them, any issue of self.

Why? Because that's what it is, right?

In the sense that like it is the us.

What's inside of me?

I have an unconscious mind.

I have a conscious mind.

I have a defensive structure.

I have a character structure.

I have a self.

Like that's what it is, right?

And all the functions that you mentioned, they're all going on within that structure of self.

They're manifesting themselves.

Like that's what it is when we're being, right?

In the active way of the verb being, right?

That's what it is, which is why we can bring to it any issue of self, even though, of course, there's tremendous complexity there.

You know, the million things that go on in a second, you know, underneath the surface in the unconscious mind and our defensive structures and how to see them.

But we're human beings.

We're complicated, right?

Like that's okay because we have methods of understanding.

We have methods of inquiry and we can use those methods to make things better.

And that's how we make the geyser as strong as it can be.

We're like, maybe some, maybe some, some of the waters running countercurrent in the, in the, okay, well, let's try and have things go all in the same direction.

But we don't need things to be perfect for, for the geyser to spring up and the agency and gratitude to then be uplifted upon it.

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So everybody has one of these maps, as I understand it.

And therefore, anytime we're talking about relationships, romantic relationships or otherwise, we're talking about the intersection.

The intersection or overlap of those maps in some way, maybe even the synergy and the outgrowth of those maps becomes its own map.

I think we'll get to this a little bit later.

Yes.

When I and most people hear the word relationships and particular romantic relationships, I make a couple of automatic assumptions.

First of all, I have to assume that people are either in a relationship or out of a relationship.

There's probably a third category out there of plurals and other things, but we'll keep it relatively simple.

And most people, I assume, when they search for or enter or entered a relationship, they thought about whether or not they had resonance with the person, whether or not, you know, there was an intellectual or mutual interest resonance or a physical resonance.

You know, maybe something about family history, common goals, et cetera.

That's typically what people think about.

And then perhaps if people have a bit more of a psychological understanding or they're reading some, you know, pop psychology books these days, you know, some of which are pretty good.

They might understand something about themselves or the other person being a bit more anxious or a bit more relaxed.

So you'll hear things like anxious attach, secure attach, things of that sort.

If we could just step back from all of that for a moment and examine it through the lens of the maps as you're describing them, which exist in all of us,

and that really are the maps to being the best version of ourselves.

If we look at relationships in terms of lists of, you know, where people went to school, if they went to school, you know, are their parents married or divorced, you know, do they have trauma that they're aware of or not aware of these kinds of things?

I guess we could call those, and here I'm borrowing language that you used earlier off camera, so I want to acknowledge that, you know, points of compatibility.

Like, I think that seems like a reasonable place to start, right?

Do people want the same thing?

So if you could, could you talk a little bit about points of compatibility in a relationship and how those show up for better or for worse when you encounter people in the clinical setting?

You know, when you see somebody who's in a relationship that's really working for them and is healthy versus if they're in a relationship where it's really unhealthy, presumably there's some knowledge about points of compatibility, but I'm guessing that's not always intuitive, right?

I think the place we start there is acknowledging what we can know and what we can't know, right?

So this idea that there are levels of emergence where things at a lower level come together and create something that's new,

we see this throughout science from subatomic particles all the way through to culture, right?

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So someone could know, theoretically, like lots and lots and lots about you and lots and lots and lots about me,

but they don't know about us, right?

Like, they don't know how we interact, they don't know if we have shared interests, what we talk about, right?

They don't know that. No one knows that. We don't know that about the combination of people. We can't know it in advance, but we often believe that we can, which then leads to a lot of false metrics of trying to figure things out.

So when we're looking for compatibility, the thought of these very basic, tangible things, like in romance, for example,

if there's someone who absolutely wants to have a family and there's someone who absolutely does not want to have a family,

okay, that would be a reason for those two people to not choose one another, right?

So there are these factors, but the factors are all, in a sense, very evident and very concrete, right?

If we go beyond that, we say, okay, we can see the obvious, right?

Then what we're looking for is really a compatibility of generative drives, right?

And then that, it tells you, can these people then get along?

Like, you know, maybe one of them is from one side of the world and the other is from the other side of the world,

or one's an accountant and the other is a musician, and, you know, it doesn't mean that, oh, they're built not to get along,

or that if they're doing the same thing, they're built to get along, or if they went to college in the same place,

or they went to college versus not going to college, right?

So there's so much there that we try to build a story on,

and then what we do is we miss the forest for the trees, right?

And the trees, I think, are the factors that don't matter.

So again, let's think about the factors that do matter.

If a person wants to have a family, or the person doesn't, that's relevant.

But the trees that mislead us might be, do they have the same level of education?

Do they have the same family structure growing up?

Are parents still together? What do they enjoy?

Are they creative or scientific or whatever?

We're creatively scientific, right?

We could look at all of that, but I think then we're making a bunch of trees that mislead us.

If you say, look, do these people come at the world through how much agency and gratitude is there guiding them?

How high is the top of that geyser? How high is it uplifting that?

How strong is the generative drive?

If we match people upon that, then we see, oh, those people got along and those people didn't.

And then there are all the other factors, like pheromones, right?

And things that we can't understand, or reflexive first impressions.

So we could let things develop honoring the truth of what we can't know,

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that when you put two people together, you get something that's different than the sum of both people, right?

It's not an overlap of maps, right?

It's a new map, right?

And the map is informed by things that are on each individual's map.

But what we're looking for are maps that don't have very significant differences around just clear, concrete things, right?

But once we get beyond that, the maps can synergize in all sorts of beautiful and unpredictable ways.

And if both are coming from the perspective of a generative drive that is at the forefront, great, you put those maps together and see what happens.

Maybe nothing happens.

Okay, those people don't go out on a second date.

You know, maybe something happens, but it doesn't develop in certain ways.

Okay, those people dated and stopped dating.

Like, this happens all the time, right?

But we set the odds in our favor that the generative drive in each that is at the forefront means that their maps can synergize in ways that can then be beautiful and ways that can maybe bring to both people that which they want.

And I think there's a simplicity to that that I think if we honor it, it can be very, very helpful, whether it's romance, it's friendships of looking at what the truth of it is instead of the factors that we try and gain a false sense of security if we're using them to select upon.

I mentioned several times the generative drive.

And I definitely would like to learn more about that and spend some time there in the context of relationships.

But just to drill a little bit further into what we've all heard so often and you touched upon a few of these things around points of compatibility but also where sometimes we can respond to the wrong things when thinking about compatibility. Again, we're framing this mainly in the context of hypothetical romantic relationships but certainly it pertains to other sorts of relationships.

Things like is one person educated with an advanced degree and is the other person also.

We tend to assume that people who are are somehow a better match than people who aren't.

It's sort of an implicit assumption that's often made, not always.

Or that if two people really love music that they will enjoy music together and therefore some of the whole is greater than either of its parts.

And I think those things are utterly irrelevant.

Interesting.

And I want to hear more about this because I think that if you think about, which I'm sure you don't, dating apps for instance, like what's listed out there or first or second dates, which consists of learning a little bit about somebody and what they're doing or maybe even a little bit about their history and maybe an activity

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and certainly an intentional awareness to how the other person is behaving in the context of different things like a waiter or a waitress and how they're treating people and you.

And then you hear about things like this is not something I'm familiar with.

Oh, right.

The love languages.

People are like, oh, what's their love languages?

It's like gifts or like acts of physical touch or acts of service or something.

I met someone recently and she told me my love language is all of them, which I think is the most honest answer, right?

Because sure, there's probably some waiting around what people value more or less.

And in the absence of the things they value the most, it would probably feel a bit like deprivation in any relationship.

But as I'm describing all this, I'm realizing more and more, yes, all of that matters, anxious, attached, secure, attached, love languages, etc.

But it really doesn't get to the heart of the matter.

It really doesn't get to this as you're describing this generative drive in individuals and whether or not those match up well along the points of compatibility with the other person's generative drive.

And, you know, I haven't run a controlled study for this, but the best evidence I have is that there are fortunately are many people out there who are in happy, healthy relationships.

But there are many, many, many people who are not, either because they can't find them or they're in them and they're not healthy or they're not happy, etc.

So if you could elaborate a bit more on the generative drive, again, reminding us what the nature of that is.

We cover this a bit in episodes one and two, but what the nature of that is and some different ways that that's expressed and how that shows up in healthy relationship.

Yeah, yeah.

I think we really disprove the idea that some of these factors that I think are superficial in the context of whether people are going to be compatible.

They're not superficial things, but they're not germane, right?

So let's say you think about music, right?

And say two people are contemplating romance, right?

And they both really like music.

Well, that could go very, very well.

Let's say they both have a strong generative drive.

Those pillars are pretty healthy and the geyser of the agency and gratitude is riding upon it and they can find peace in themselves.

They're strongly generative.

Then they could become interested in the music the other person likes.

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There's not going to be a complete overlap, right?
Even if people generally like the same thing,
but let's say they like different things, like just liking music or even liking the same music,
there's still difference, right?
So the person has to go beyond themselves, right?
And say, okay, I'm interested in like what you think even about the music we both like, right?
What factors do you like?
There are places of learning and of growth for both.
And you could see how both liking music, whether it's the same or different music, that sounds
great, right?
But you could also see how that could not be great, right?
If the generative drive is too low and the aggression drive is too high,
then I'm going to think I like music, my music is better than yours, right?
People then start, they'll fragment, right?
Even though they have the same interest or if the pleasure drive is too high,
then they think I want to listen to my music, not yours.
I'm familiar with it instead of, hey, I'm interested in that music because you're interested in it
and I'm interested in you, right?
Which leads us to the second part.
Let's say you have someone who really has no interest in music and someone who does.
Well, there can be an openness of saying, if I'm interested in this person
and this person is really interested in music, like, well, I have some interest in it, right?
I want to learn something about it.
I want to experience some of it with the other person.
And let's say that person then finds, hey, that's not my thing.
It's not the thing we connect on.
Then why would that be the end of the world?
One person goes to concerts, the other doesn't, right?
So we try and find these points of commonality because I think we get over-reductionist
and then we think, oh, here's a bunch of factors that we will identify.
And what they do is they obscure us from the primary factor, which is the generative drive,
which of course will then induce open-mindedness, mentalization.
If I don't like music and you do, instead of saying, what is he like music for?
I need a friendship with somebody who likes music.
You think, hey, that's interesting.
If I'm interested in you as a friend and I have respect for you and what you think,
then why would I not have some interest in what you're interested in?
So this idea of compatibility revolves around the health in each person.
It doesn't revolve around factors that are anything but the concrete logistical factors
that would just keep two people apart.
I love the idea that healthy relationships center around the factors that really matter within the self,
in particular the generative drive.
And I love the example of someone being able to be curious about somebody's interests,

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about their partner's interests, even though they might not share those, from the standpoint of agency and gratitude, because the agency component there is really key. I think that a lot of people feel as if they aren't really good at something or really knowledgeable about something, then it's not for them, right? Which is the opposite of having agency and gratitude because gratitude is closely tied to humility. How could we know everything? It can be good certain things and not others. So the way you describe it includes aspects of openness, of humility, but also the agency side, the empowerment. If I'm going to learn more, then perhaps we could enjoy more of that together. Perhaps not, right? I think this is what I'm sensing, and I'm also sensing that the words like-minded, like-minded people has so much more to do with their generative drives and how those match up as opposed to the activities that they prefer engaging in and the sorts of foods they like or the movies they like, which makes sense at some level, but I think it is still counterintuitive for a lot of us who just kind of reflexively think, oh, they like the same things, you know, or maybe even they met at work because they like the same type of work. They like to live in a certain area of the country, and therefore by proximity they met. And this raises all sorts of interesting ideas perhaps about the statistics of what we see, right? Two musicians together, we therefore assume that musicians belong together, or two scientists together. I know loads of scientist-scientist couples or scientist-physician couples, but of course the numbers are skewed because they were working in environments where it increased the probability they would interact. So this is actually a vote for online dating in some sense because it breaks through all those sometimes even geographical barriers, but certainly the traditional barriers of culture. If you think about, we're talking about relationships, so I would like my relationships to last as long as possible, right? That means now we're talking about my lifespan and my health span, right? That then becomes part of that discussion, and of course we're very interested in lifespan and health span, and we see people do much, much better when they're interconnected in the world around them, when they're still learning new things. We know that's true, that people often will trail off of what they're learning, whether it's music, it's literature, it's the world around us relatively early in our lifespan, but the person who's interconnected learning new things has a much greater probability of living longer and living healthier, right? So what's that about? It's about a generative drive, right? You know what? I've learned a lot of things over the course of my life, and I'm 80 years old now, and like, great that there's more to learn, right? And like, that's what you see.

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It makes me think of a woman who's around 90 years old in my practice who, like, she's always learning new things, like she's super interested in things, and I'm always struck about how, like, she seems so much younger, right? And there, that's not just a selection bias, like, oh, I just happen to see that in that person. Like, she has the factors that predispose to aging in the way that's healthiest and happiest. So it really comes down to the root of all of it in ourselves, in our relationships, in the quality of them over time, and how long we get to have them arises from a generative drive, and that's the thing that makes us then undefended, right? And lets us find interest in things about other people that are different from the things in us, which also comes about naturally. Like, I think it's interesting that we have this sort of bias, like, musicians belong together. Well, why? They're familiar with the same things, right? I guess they have the same interests, same thing with scientists, but then a lot of people like different foods, right? Like, I love different ethnic foods. Like, why? Because it's different, right? It's an appreciation of difference. I don't want to eat just like I did growing up, and many, many, many people are like that. That's an appreciation of difference, of diversity. And sometimes we'll kind of harness that, and we'll look at it, and we'll say, oh, like, that's present in us. But for whatever reason, we become very reductionist about relationships, and now we're trying to match based upon sameness, right? And, like, sameness is not the point of it. I mean, there are even thoughts, right, about people then in some way seeking difference, right? And maybe pheromones are telling us that. Like, I actually know very little about that, but I certainly know that striving for sameness doesn't make good things happen in relationships. You know, I've been doing this for over 20 years, and, like, I don't see that the alleged factors of sameness matter, unless they're so concrete. Like, if this person is absolutely going to live in North America, and that person is absolutely going to live in South America, let's not potentially put them together. But once we get away from almost that level of concreteness, let's look for something different than, like, everything else. It simplifies, right? The higher we go up the ladder, the more simple things get. If you're looking at the pillar's structure of self, function of self, you're creating the agency and gratitude, then what are you looking for when you're looking for a partner? A match in generative drive.

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I want to be, I want mine to be strong,
and I see that it's strong in this person.
They create in a way.
You know what?
I do science, they grow a garden.
We're generative together, right?
Like, that could be super compatible,
because we're looking at the one factor that really matters.
I'd like to take a brief break
and acknowledge one of our sponsors, AG1.
AG1 is a vitamin mineral probiotic drink
that meets all of your foundational nutrition needs.
I started taking AG1 way back in 2012,
so I'm delighted that they're sponsoring the podcast.
The reason I started taking AG1
and the reason I still take AG1 once or generally twice per day
is that it's the easiest way for me to ensure
that I'm getting all of the vitamins, minerals, probiotics,
and fiber that I need in my diet.
Now, of course, it's essential to get proper nutrition from whole foods.
But most people, including myself,
find it hard to get enough servings of fruits and vegetables each day,
and especially to get enough prebiotics and probiotics
to ensure gut health.
As you may know, your gut contains trillions of little microbiota,
the so-called gut microbiome,
which establishes critical connections
with other organs of your body to enhance brain health,
as well as to support your immune system and other aspects
that relate to mental and physical health.
One of the most common questions I get
is if you were to take just one supplement,
which supplement would that be?
And my answer is always AG1,
because by taking AG1,
I'm able to ensure that I'm getting all of the vitamins, minerals,
and probiotics that I need
to enhance my mental health, physical health, and performance.
If you'd like to try AG1,
go to drinkag1.com slash huberman to claim a special offer.
They'll give you five free travel packs,
and they'll give you a year's supply of vitamin D3K2.
Again, that's drinkag1.com slash huberman

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to claim this special offer.
I'm realizing that most of what I and everyone else
has heard about relationships is complete nonsense.
I really mean that.
I mean, it has occurred to me before,
because I've experienced both,
that the phrase is,
absence makes the heart grow fonder,
and out of sight, out of mind
are in direct contradiction with one another.
So they're both true.
It depends on the circumstances,
and who the hell knows why.
You also hear opposites attract,
but they don't stay together.
You hear similar, the important thing
is to find someone similar to you,
or that there's like one person.
I mean, these are, if we really think about it,
crazy notions, but they drive
a lot of what people think about relationships.
They drive angst.
They drive angst.
They drive bad choices.
They drive situations that then create a sense of guilt
and shame and inadequacy.
We mislead ourselves by not going to the basics
of what is actually true.
I mean, look at myself.
Make myself as healthy as I can be.
Because if I'm healthy,
I'll recognize a lack of health in the other.
So it also protects us against bad relationships.
And then if I'm gonna make myself healthy,
which we're describing how that looks,
wouldn't I want someone who also
wants to make themselves healthier,
at least if we're gonna ally, right?
Let's ally around making both of ourselves healthier.
Absolutely.
And we're going to go deeper into how to
look into the map of self
and how that relates to relationship

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certainly more as we go along this discussion.
You've mentioned several times, however,
about generative drive and that it really is
the definition of like-minded in some sense.
And you also mentioned aggressive drives
and pleasure drives, themes that we touched on again
in episodes one and two,
but listening to those episodes is certainly not necessary
to digest what we're talking about today.
Could you go a little bit deeper into the generative drive,
flesh out for us what that is?
I think generative, I think generator, I think energy.
I hear aggression or aggressive drive.
I think as I think most people do,
friction, maybe even conflict,
maybe physical conflict, maybe verbal conflict,
but I know it's some of that perhaps,
but a whole lot more.
And then pleasure drive and pleasure.
Some people think bliss, some people think delight.
Some people probably have all sorts of specific things
they think of with respect to pleasure.
So if you could just flesh those out for us a little bit more
because I think those are going to serve as
cornerstones of today's discussion.
Sure.
So drives, and in this case, the generative drive,
sort of exist within us.
And what they do is they're defining potential.
So right now, one could argue,
if we just pause for a couple of seconds,
we're not doing anything generative in those seconds.
But then we resume doing something
that we believe is generative.
So at the time we're pausing,
that's when we can sort of look at that as a drive
within us to make new learning.
To understand things we didn't understand before,
to spread a sense of goodness.
So it resides in us in a way that is determined
by a whole bunch of different factors.
Like everything else that's determined within us,
there's a nature and a nurture component.

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So some aspect of it,
or what are the genetics that came down to us?
What are formative experiences?
But we can go in and alter that.
So if we see the drive as a set of potentials,
like in that moment we pause,
there's a set of potentials within us.
Like potential of where we can take our thoughts,
our actions, our reflections, our decisions.
That's the drive within us.
And it exists within us in a way
that we could localize now.
Like if we think enough about,
okay, how much of a generative drive is there in a person?
How much is that person looking to make a better life
for themselves or a better world around them?
And how do they feel about themselves
and their ability to do that?
How generative are they?
Or how shut down or demoralized or envious?
So we can in a sense localize that.
And again, the localization has these genetic
and nurture components to it.
But we can then go and influence that.
And that's the importance.
If the drive is a set of potentials,
a set of possibilities,
then that drive is one in the same pervaded with
however we want to describe that
with the agency and gratitude.
Because the agency and gratitude
is sort of the operative form of that.
That's the verb, right?
It's the drive actually driving something, right?
So if you have a strong generative drive,
then agency and gratitude are leading.
The decisions, the reflections are coming through that.
The aggression within us.
Or again, that's the historical word.
But so we can say aggression, assertion, proactiveness, right?
All of this inside of us.
And our drive for pleasure, for gratification, right?
That all is then, it's in us,

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but it's observing the generative drive.
Meaning the generative drive, that set of potentials
and possibilities is dominant.
Which of course makes sense with agency and gratitude,
those active verbs being what is most active, right?
And then we're also gonna feel at times
and hopefully at a lot of times, right?
That set of peacefulness, that sets of contentment,
the sense of delight, right?
What you're describing when you're, you know,
doing the podcast and you're in it
and all these good things are happening to you, right?
There's a strong generative drive in you.
That set of potentials are being actualized
through the verbs of agency and gratitude.
Like you're doing it all right then.
And as you're doing it, you have a sense of peace
and contentment as you're enacting all of it.
And then that makes you healthier,
reinforces the generative drive.
It protects you against the next sling or arrow
of outrageous fortune that will come your way, right?
You become more self-knowledgeable, more,
you become stronger, right?
And ultimately, that's what we're looking for.
Like that's the state of goodness.
And I believe that if you look historically,
what is it that we're seeking?
We can put so many words to it.
And we're choosing to put these words to it.
I mean, I think that this is the structure
because I think the science, the history,
the clinical experience, the phenomenology,
I think it all tells us this.
We can put different words to it.
But what we're looking at when we're looking at truth
and how to get to the happiness, quote, unquote,
that people have sought through the ages,
I mean, I think we know enough now,
we've learned enough that we can say,
oh, this is what it looks like.
And it fits the arbiter of all truth,
which is as you get further up the hierarchy,

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it gets simpler.
That's true about humans.
What's going on in my unconscious
is very, very complicated, right?
But if that's summing to as we get higher up
to like I'm approaching the world
with a lot of agency and gratitude, right?
That's a lot simpler.
And that's what can be common among us,
which is why if my pillars are very different from your pillars
and what we've struggled against, each is very different
and what we may still have to work against is very different.
Well, we can be extremely compatible as friends
because are we working on ourselves?
Are we fostering the generative drive?
So we're coming at the world in that way
and agency and gratitude, that's the similarity, right?
Between us that matters.
And ultimately we're looking at the potential
that every moment we're building the potential in us
for what comes at the next moment,
which is why we're describing the overlap,
the point of commonality that really matters,
that matters, we're putting a label to it, right?
We're saying it's the generative drive.
But it is also that, okay, we both come at the world
through agency and gratitude
if two people are assessing compatibility,
but if we're looking at something to nest that under
and what seems most logical is the set of potentials within us
that we're building and altering each moment.
And then as I alter it in this moment, right,
it's altered and it affects my next moment, right?
If I do something that's just kind of thoughtless to somebody,
you know, because I'm in a bad mood, right?
Then what am I doing?
I'm projecting out my aggression.
I'm doing something that basically makes me less than, right?
And then I'm gonna feel less in the next moment,
whether that moment is about me or is about someone else.
The drives are the potentials in us,
but we are actively working on them
determining them, changing them each moment.

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I'm well on board the idea that the typical pairings, let's call them the idiosyncratic pairings of, you know, musician with musician in many cases, but, you know, sometimes very verbal person with quieter person, you know, introvert with extrovert or introvert with introvert. All of that takes backseat or perhaps even back backseat and perhaps even is out of the vehicle compared to the critical importance of generative drive. Right.

When we think about generative drives in individuals, you beautifully describe what a generative drive is and how it shows up in individuals.

When thinking about generative drives in romantic relationships, however, because generative drive can be expressed to varying degrees, does one often see that or do you think that a matching of sort of levels of generative drives is what fosters the best relationships?

In other words, let's say somebody has a pretty high pleasure drive, but not a very strong aggressive also called proactiveness drive.

And so maybe like they watch a lot of Netflix, like a lot of Netflix,

but they're not even the sort of person that's like really excited about the shows and telling you about them

because there's a version of watching a lot of Netflix where the person is really interested in learning and in knowing, maybe even they're thinking about writing something,

you know, poetry or book,

or they're bringing some of that to their life, right?

I mentioned it that way because watching Netflix isn't bad per se, right?

It's not anti-generative.

Is it an escape or is it generative?

Is a person thinking about what they're going to do?

They're going to write that book

or are they just trying to numb out

and at the end of five hours in front of the television, they don't know what those five hours were, right?

There's no intrinsic value judgment

based upon a lot of things that we make intrinsic value, we make value judgments about, right?

You have to look at who is the person?

What is the context?

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Are they being generative or not?

Yeah, some of the movies and shows that I've watched in relationships became the points of connection around, at least to me, tremendously interesting discussions on hikes that we took the next day and reflections on our own relationship and work and life.

And so I'm so glad that you point out that there's nothing intrinsically valuable or invaluable about something like Netflix or even intrinsically passive about doing something like sitting around or even reading books for that matter.

There's a passive version of reading great books.

Also, people forget that.

It's hard to read a great book and not learn something.

I guess that's why they're called great books, but there is a version of that.

People want to possess the book.

I read the book and I'm going to check it off.

I don't know what was in it.

People do that.

That is not generative.

So should we consider matching of level or expression of generative drives

as perhaps what we are all seeking in seeking relationship?

And do you think that people tend to pair up, naturally pair up with people that have a similar level of generative drive?

Or if they don't, do you think it leads to problems?

Yeah, I think that by and large people don't, that it's not the thing that we're thinking about and looking for in ourselves or others.

And I absolutely believe that it makes problems.

Let's take a look.

To not look.

It makes problems to not look.

Right.

It makes sense.

The fact that we're not basing it upon generative drive does indeed, I think, make many, many, many, many, many, and in fact, countless problems.

And I would take as an example, think about the idea of a trauma bond.

A trauma bond is not a bad thing.

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That sounds like a strong statement
because the way that I hear trauma bond used is a bad thing.
But it doesn't have to be.
So let's take a look at it.
Imagine that you have what people call a trauma bond.
You have two people who will make up a situation.
They're functioning in the world around them,
but they each have had some very significant trauma
that is creating issues in them.
So let's say they're avoidance issues.
A person doesn't feel safe or comfortable in the world around them.
They get invited to places that they'd like to go,
but they don't go.
They want to go to the museum
and see something really new and cool there,
but there might be a crowd.
I mean, this happens.
And let's say you have two people who both have this in them.
It could be because the trauma is similar.
The trauma could be night and day,
but they each have this in them.
They could bond around that trauma in a way that worsens the trauma.
That's why people think negatively of a trauma bond.
So if the case is that the trauma bond is not a good thing
for these two people who say, why is that?
It's not because both of them have had trauma
and both of them are impacted by trauma
and both of them are impacted by trauma in similar ways.
It's not that.
It's that the drives are not in a healthy place
and the gratification of the generative drive
and the pleasure drives are not high enough.
So let's imagine the generative drive
could be relatively low in each of these people
and one or the other,
or they could have a naturally high drive
that's being thwarted.
So there's something that's out of balance.
Where the drive is, the ability to express the drive.
Is there enough agency?
If there's not, like let's say one person is really, really shut down.
That person can't stand their job.
Something is shutting that person down.

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The generative drive wishes greater expression.
They go back and look at themselves.
You can bring that into line.
But something is out of balance at the time.
The pleasure drive may be low or it may be high,
but it may not be gratified.
It may be that that person loves museums
and wants to go to the museum,
but can't find that gratification.
That's a possibility.
The aggression or assertion drive would be on the low end,
but it could be higher.
Maybe if that person felt safer,
that drive within them has a lot of latitude in it.
Maybe it could move higher.
But something is out of balance in the drives
and in their expression.
That's the problem,
because let's look at the other side
where a trauma bond is a great thing.
Each of the people in the example has trauma,
and they recognize it in themselves
and they understand how it makes things harder for them.
They're communicating about how it makes it hard in the other.
Maybe there's a lot of overlap in social avoidance
and sense of vulnerability,
but maybe there are things that are different
in one person versus the other.
So then they can come together and say,
what's the goal of life?
I would like to be as healthy as I can be.
I'm working on myself.
You want to be as healthy as you can be.
We want to be as healthy as we can be.
And if we're healthy,
we also help each of us be healthy.
So maybe those two people,
neither of which they would ever go to the museum on their own,
because the trauma inside of them is at a point
that hasn't been worked through,
or it's at a place where they just simply feel too vulnerable.
But together, they can go to the museum.
And then the bond around trauma helps them be healthy.

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The drives are in a better place
because they're able to recognize,
hey, there are things going on in me
that I'd like to be different and better,
and you recognize that too,
and we can talk about it with one another.
So they're in a healthier place,
and then from that healthier place,
they build greater health.
So much of what we hear about in terms of friction points
in relationship centers around,
it seems, communication or lack of communication.
And as you're describing the role of the generative drive
in healthy relationship,
it seems to me that it ties back in every way
to agency and gratitude
and agency being such a critical element of communication
because wherever you've identified that,
okay, there's a potential problem here,
people with high generative drive in these examples
seem to be capable of self-inquiry,
asking the other person questions
that bring them closer together
and to a deeper understanding of the self.
I raise this because one thing that's often overheard
or that I've overheard,
of course I have siblings and friends,
and I'll place this in the way that I've most typically heard it,
but I'm sure it exists other ways too,
the conversation in my head is one where a woman is saying,
they're with somebody or dating somebody,
and he's so clueless.
I wish that he would just do this thing.
Sometimes these are acts of chivalry,
like maybe it's flowers or vacations,
but more often than not,
it's a request or a complaint about a lack of proactiveness.
This is also what ratchets up to these very pan statements
that you hear like, there's no real men these days
or like there are no real men left or this kind of thing.
You also hear it in the reverse,
you hear men making pan statements about women,
and here we're doing this in the context of heterosexual pairings,

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but of course it could all work just as well in homosexual pairings.
It could all work in the context of homosexual pairings too.
So you hear those sorts of things
and it sounds like a lack of communication,
maybe one person needs to be better at asking for their needs to be met,
maybe the other person needs to develop more of an awareness
of what the other person needs.
Of course we all seem to kind of intrinsically wish
that things would just happen for us without the need to request them
or ask for them, but I'm realizing again
that all of that is distracting commotion
because that's not really what's going on.
What's really going on, it seems,
is that the engine behind communication,
the engine behind curiosity,
the desire to learn and know
and create something from that learning and knowing in the relationship.
The generative drive is really what's the issue
or the lack of generative drive in any of those conversations.
It seems one could circle back to that and go,
okay, well, someone's not asking the right questions
and therefore not doing the right things
because they don't either have a sense of agency
or they don't have gratitude for the situation they're in,
including their own ability to do that.
When you hear people aren't showing up for the relationship,
they're not showing up or she's not showing up
or, again, let's make the pan statement go in the other direction
that somebody just wants a lot of attention.
They just need an excess amount of attention,
won't let me do my own thing but also wants me to work and be successful.
Again, these are stereotypes,
but all of that seems very distracting.
However, all of it seems far simpler
if we push it through this filter of generative drives
and whether or not it's being expressed.
Yes.
I think maybe the best example of this because it's so highly charged
is imagine that the pleasure drive through the lens of sex and sexuality.
So imagine that people are in a pairing,
they're in a relationship because of how they got,
they were taking people in a relationship.
And one has a sex drive, which means an interest in sex

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and maybe proclivities for diversity of sexual experience.

Let's say if we just for sake of this example, we put on a 1 to 10 scale, that person is a 2.

Now it's the other person in the relationship.

The 10 being the greatest.

Yes, sorry.

Sorry.

That person is a 2.

Now let's say the partner is an 8.

So there's a big mismatch there.

You think, how does that normally go?

The 2 stays a 2.

The 8 stays an 8.

And things don't go well, right?

It creates friction in the relationship at a minimum.

It blows the relationship apart at a maximum.

The person who's a 2 feels inadequate often.

I mean, it's not always right, but this is how this often goes.

Person who's a 2 feels inadequate because the person who's an 8 wants either more or different, right?

And the person who's a 2 does it.

Now that person feels bad and they may feel bad about themselves or resentful of the person with a higher sex drive.

The person on the higher level feels now resentful of the person

at the lower level or maybe they feel like there's something

wrong with them because their sex drive is too high

or they have an interest that the other person doesn't have

and now they start labeling themselves.

Like this happens all the time and it doesn't change

most of the time and the problems are enormous.

So let's see, how could that look with really high generative

drives and therefore the ability to think about self,

to think about others and to think about the us of the situation,

the two people together, right?

So they'd be able to talk about it in ways that wouldn't be

faulting of the other and would acknowledge what's inside of them.

Like the person with the lower drive could say,

you know, it just doesn't strike me as more interesting.

I don't think about it more.

They could talk about all of that.

The person who wishes more or wishes different

could talk about that too, right?

And could talk about what they feel inside

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if there's a frustration of that,
just like the person with the lower sex drive
could talk about how frustrating it feels to feel pressured, right?
So what are they developing?
They're mentalizing, right?
They're thinking about each other's emotional states
and they're coming at each other through agency and gratitude.
Like I'm so grateful for you.
The example is these people are partners
and they're happy with their partnership.
Like, oh my God, I'm so grateful I found you, right?
They would each feel that way.
I'm so grateful you're in my life.
Like this happens too, right?
And then from that lens, you know,
the two isn't going to become an eight.
The eight isn't going to become a two, right?
But in general, in situations like this,
there can be somewhere in the middle, right?
And let's say the two, you know,
he says like, okay, you know what?
I can get out of my comfort zone a little bit.
Why don't most people try that?
Because they feel embarrassed.
They feel self-conscious.
You know, they don't want to try new things or try more.
People get closed down
because there's such shame around sexuality.
You can take people on any spectrum of sexuality
and you will find shame, you know, not in every person,
but across whatever population we're looking at
because it's so emotionally charged.
So let's say in a loving, caring relationship,
you're like, that person feels the freedom inside.
Say, you know what?
Maybe I could enjoy sex a little more,
a little more often, a little more intimate.
That person thinks about it like somebody who's at a two
can then move that to a different place,
you know, a little bit more
or maybe even a lot more depending.
And then the person who's at the higher level,
you know, the eight doesn't need another eight, right?

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In order to stay in the relationship.
But something maybe more than a two, right?
And then let's say they come into the middle
and then the person who's an eight realizes like,
look, I love you and you love me
and you out of your comfort zone, right?
In order to do this and like, and wow,
and it's like more fun for both of us.
So like, you know what?
It's okay.
My higher sex drive, I'll deal with that.
That maybe just making it up like,
I would like to do it three times a week.
We're doing it two.
Okay. You know what?
That's fine.
Both sides can live with it,
but it is not threadbare.
So I'm like, well, they can live with it.
It's like, no, number one, they can live with it.
Number two, it's better.
It's better, right?
The two at one point was thinking,
hey, anything more than a two is I can't do that, right?
Shut down on the eight doesn't want anything less than an eight.
Now they're in the middle and their relationship is closer.
That's real.
That happens.
What is it relying upon?
It's relying upon the generative drive to have the openness,
the ability to communicate.
Maybe the person who's an eight say,
has a sexual proclivity they're embarrassed about.
That happens all the time too.
But in the sense of acceptance of self and the belief in the strength
of the relationship and the acceptance of the other,
you know, people can broach things.
Most people who feel like, oh, I could never broach that.
It's not something bizarre or dangerous.
Like it's not something that in a relationship that's,
that's defined by the generative drive,
the other person is likely to reject.
So let's define our relationships through the generative drive

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and let's cultivate in self and others the most generative drive.
If somehow, let's say person A and person B here,
because it doesn't matter who's the eight and who's the two,
has cultivated more of a generative drive,
then maybe that person could give more to the other
before that person can give back to them.
You know, we have these, I think just completely nonsensical ideas
about mutuality, right?
The idea that even in a situation that's supposed to be defined by love,
friendship is a form of love, right?
So friendship, a collaborative endeavor, right?
They have some affection in them, right?
Friendship can have love and often does.
And let's say the love of romance,
that there's supposed to be some equality, right?
The idea that, well, if I'm going to give something,
I want you to give something too.
It is not good if one person is always doing the giving.
Things are out of balance,
but it is very healthy to be able to say,
you know, if I can give something and you're not in a place to give something,
let me just give something to you, right?
People don't always, or maybe don't often,
depend on how we want to look at it,
give to others with a sense of freedom,
like, and you don't owe me anything either, right?
Why? Because it comes from love.
It comes from the abundance, the excess of goodness in me
coming through the agency that I feel, the gratitude that I feel,
and then what's more likely?
You're much more likely the other person, right?
To sort of feel like, hey, I can go a little more,
you feel stronger, you feel empowered,
making someone feel worse,
or saying, you know what, I can give you something,
but you owe me something back, right?
Even if that's tacit, right?
I'll give you, you know, I can give you this now,
but you kind of know that the other person
could end up doing the laundry for two months or something.
Like, this is not okay, why don't I just give something, right?
You're giving goodness,
and then the other person actually gets the goodness,

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and they're more likely to find it within themselves, right?

To then come a little out of their comfort zone, develop, you know, move their generative drive a little bit forward.

So gifts given to others with no expectation of return are gifts of abundance.

They're gifts that arise from the generative drive, and they make us more generative.

Think about the opposite.

What often happens?

Each person makes the other feel guilty, right?

Right, oh, this person wants, he wants so much, and look, there you are again, like, people feel terrible about that, or, you know, there you don't want any sex, or this or that.

The other person feels terrible, like,

that's why the two stays the two,

and the eight stays the eight, right?

But it doesn't have to be that way, and it's also not that if both end up in the middle, say both are a five,

that that's some compromised position that implies less.

No, that's the compromised position that makes more.

I'd like to take a brief break

and acknowledge our sponsor, Eight Sleep.

Eight Sleep makes smart mattress covers with cooling, heating, and sleep tracking capacity.

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Based on my understanding of the generative drive, the aggressive, also we're calling it proactiveness drive, and the pleasure drive,

and the importance of the generative drive being greater than the aggressive or pleasure drives, can also see the potential problem of having like two eights along the sexual desire scale, or two nines, or two tens, and actually I've observed a lot of examples of this.

For instance, if there are, let's say two nines, both people, nine out of 10 on the joy and sort of proclivity for sex, adventurous sex, et cetera, they're very high on the pleasure scale.

Perhaps even so much so that they don't pay attention to or one person doesn't pay attention to the critical need for points of compatibility to be met, like the desire to someday have a family.

I've known couples like this.

They're together for a long time.

They seem to really enjoy one another.

I know nothing of their sex lives, but there just seems to be a very strong attachment around certain forms of pleasure that they both enjoy engaging in.

So this could be activities or travel.

We're saying nine out of 10 on the sex scale, but in many of those cases, there's one person saying, but I want to have a family someday

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and they're just not into that, or perhaps even like,
but he won't leave his wife.
They're like involved in something that feels really good.
They're matching along some pleasure drive,
but completely overlooking the larger goals
of one or both people.
Here I point you to an instance of infidelity.
That's its own issues with morals, et cetera,
but you see this a lot.
People really orienting towards what feels good
and who feels good to be with,
and that of course is healthy,
but that's not the entire picture.
So would you say that what I'm describing
is an example of where the pleasure drive
has overcome the generative drive
because in the case of somebody wanting a family
and the other person already having one
and being unwilling to leave that one
or the other person not wanting a family,
that the generative drive of the person
who wants a family is not being respected
or it's being undermined by this excess desire for pleasure.
Like they're just drawn into the moment
and the amazing weekends,
but this person's incredible and they're charismatic
and I can't tell you how many times I've had friends say
that they admire the person they're with,
but they know their relationship can't work
because of all these other underlying issues, right?
Right, right, right.
It's interesting, we both overestimate
and underestimate what say love can do, right?
People say love can do anything.
No, if I spill that glass,
love's not gonna put the water back in it, right?
If I must live in North America
and my partner must live in South America,
we're not gonna be okay, right?
So we say these things in a very wishful way,
love will overcome everything,
like it doesn't overcome that, right?
Or maybe it does in the right circumstances.

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So think about if the generative drive is very, very high, right, in both people. So both people have, say, a strong need to live in a certain place. They can find a compromised position. Maybe they live half the year in North America and half in South America. But why? Because in that situation, the love between them, which is the generative drive in the relationship, right? So what does that mean? The first person has to have a strong generative drive, be healthy, understand that even though I need to live in North America, right? Does it actually mean that? Do I really need to live in North America? Right, I have to be able to see beyond myself and what does that mean to the person I love who needs to live on the other side of the world? If the other person can do that too, then in the relationship, right, which is a new entity, right? It emerges from one person and the other. You can know everything about one person, everything about the other. You don't know about the two of them together, right? So the two of them together are an us. And if that us has a strong generative drive, which it can, if each person has a strong generative drive, they can bring to the state of emergence of the us the generative drive. And we're talking about a relationship. So say the love between them and they can find a way through. So the idea that love cures all things, which is finding what does that actually mean, right? It doesn't mean we have a lot of pleasure together, right? Or we like a lot of the same things. That's not what that means. And people can very, very much love one another, but not be aware of the limitations inside of them, right? Because maybe there are other things going on in them. Like say childhood trauma, they love one another, but they can't get out of their comfort zone enough, right?

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So the point is if we make ourselves as healthy as we can be and then two selves come together that are making themselves as healthy as they can be, then the us between them really can fit that definition of love and do anything.

But we have to define that in the right way

in a way that honors the truth,

which again is not a higher degree of complexity.

It's actually more simple.

So you gave an example of a romantic relationship

where one person has a strong sex drive

and the other a weaker drive.

And then we talked about an example

where both people have a essentially high sex drive

and where that could potentially be beneficial,

assuming that the generative drive is also high in both of them.

And we also explored a little bit

of how it can be bad for a relationship

if it exceeds the generative drive.

What about the aggressive proactiveness drive?

How does that show up in romantic pairings?

You know, if one person has a high proactiveness,

aka aggressive drive, and the other person does not,

what does that look like?

And do you see that often in your clinical practice?

Sure, sure.

If this makes sense, maybe we look at that example

of the person who's a two and the person who's an eight

on the sex drive scale, right?

You'd say, okay, the person who's a two

who's trying to raise that, right?

Has a strong generative drive.

What does that mean?

The person thinks, you know what?

I think I can do this.

I can set myself about this.

I see it will make my relationship better.

Like, I'm going to give it a try.

That's the generative drive in action.

The pleasure drive, the person may look at that and say,

look, maybe this can be more fun for me, right?

Like, has it been that fun for me?

If I have a low pleasure drive,

could I start enjoying this more?

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And then maybe that moves up, right?
Or maybe I have a higher pleasure drive,
but it's not been gratified
because I haven't been able to be open and honest.
Like, let me see if I can make that better.
Then what's active?
Like what the person is doing is then going to the aggressive
or assertive, proactive, right?
To that drive and going to the potential in that drive
and mining some of what's in it.
Like, yeah, how am I going to do that?
I'm going to bring myself to bear, right?
And like, that's not an easy thing.
It's not like that person then all of a sudden decides
to be more sexual, right?
There have to be a lot of communication between the two people,
a lot of discussion of what setting might be best for that,
what helps the person feel understood
or feel more comfortable.
Like, there's a lot then to do there
and the person may even need to go back to the pillars, right?
Because the person may feel like,
whoa, I don't think I can do that, right?
And then he goes, that's not good.
I want to do that, right?
What is it that I can't do?
There's a realization there.
And then maybe the person who's an aide
because they're so well connected gets it.
Okay, you can't do that.
Like, let me support you, right?
In whatever way, while you're figuring that out
because they're both gendered,
they want to figure that out.
Sorry to interrupt.
When you say go back to the pillars,
you mean go back to exploring the structure of themselves
and the function of themselves.
So that they can, for instance,
get some insight into what sorts of defense mechanisms
might be in place, what they're paying attention to,
or their behaviors, like maybe even health-related behaviors
that could be impacting their sex drive.

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But maybe even things that reside at a deeper level, the unconscious mind, talking to somebody until they make a connection around shame or some story that they've integrated into their thinking at a subconscious level.

Right, right.

Just an example that I see a lot is avoidance, where, again, not always, but let's say the person with, who's the two on the sex drive scale, who finds like, I can't do it, right?

Well, I just can't bring myself to do it, right?

And then they go back and they explore, this happens a lot, where there's avoidance.

And then we get curious about the avoidance.

Like, because the person's like,

I just, there's something to adjust.

I don't want to do that, right?

Okay, so there's avoidance.

We identify avoidance.

We also identify that it's not healthy because the person does actually want to do that because it's good for the relationship and it could be good for them too.

And then maybe we start looking at unconscious mind, right?

Or conscious mind, right?

And maybe we don't find, because it's easy now, if I said, oh, there was a major trauma that the person hasn't processed.

Sometimes it's that.

But a lot of times it's not that.

You know, maybe that person just never learned to feel comfortable with sexuality.

Or maybe the way that they experience or are attracted to sexuality was disparaged or denigrated, right?

Or, you know, they had some bad feeling about it because the society and the culture told them that.

Or maybe they had a couple of bad experiences where they were treated in a certain way.

And then it's like, okay, that person comes by that honestly.

There's not a major trauma there.

In fact, unfortunately, there's a trauma that's almost predictable from the way our society,

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you know, has been structured.
So a person can go look at them like, right.
Like, I never, I never learned how to do this
or how to be comfortable with this.
Or, you know, I learned that I'm not good at it
or I learned that no one will enjoy it with me.
But that's not true.
Like these are situations,
not in a side of a loving relationship, right?
Now that person is able to bring that knowledge to bear,
whether it came from the unconscious mind
or the conscious mind.
And then that's how you work to start shifting things.
Like that was then this is now, right?
It is not then when say the person say in high school
had a sexuality that others didn't approve of
and made them feel bad.
Well, guess what?
It's not then.
And like that's unfortunate.
It's wrong.
It's unjust.
We're going to honor and validate all that that is.
But we're also going to look at that that was then this is now
and you get to behave differently now.
You're an adult now and adults get to choose their relationships
and you chose a good relationship, right?
So this is the kind of thing that can get that person
to the point where they can go back up through.
Now what happens at the end of it?
The geyser is stronger.
There's more agency.
There's more of a sense of gratitude, right?
Why?
Because the person can attach themselves more to,
I'm so lucky to have this person as opposed to,
damn it, I wish that person didn't have a higher sex drive, right?
So the person and they feel better about themselves
instead of what's wrong with me that I don't have a higher sex drive, right?
Or I said they wish the other person had a lower sex drive
or wish they had a higher sex drive.
That's not grateful.
Like I'm grateful.

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I am who I am and that I have any sex drive at all and I'm grateful for this other person.
Now through that, that change, right?
They can go back and better access the assertion, the proactive drive, the aggressive drive, whatever we want to call it because they've taken away, they've gone and worked through the barrier to it. Then they're able to be a little more out of their comfort zone and the other person meets them there, right?
And they start having this healthy thing between them where the us that is them, the love between them gets better, right?
And then where do they find themselves?
That's how they get to the five, which is not a compromise between eight and two that satisfies neither. It is a compromise between eight and two that is way better for both and for the relationship.
I'm curious about common pairings that you observe in the clinical setting and not to focus on the bad, but if there are common pairings that rarely lead to a good outcome, I think it's worth us learning about those simply because they're common and they lead to a bad outcome and a discussion of this sort could potentially help people avoid such pairings or at least recognize that they're in such pairings.
And I realize, of course, because of the way that we're framing things during this series, that any time we talk about a pairing, we're really talking about two maps coming together, forming a new and somewhat independent map that represents the relationship. I have to assume that many people in the world have maps that are very, very healthy and they're probably even those rare individuals that don't need to go into those cupboards that reside within structure of self and function of self and do any work, but for those of you that are just listening and not watching this, I'm sort of smiling as I'm saying that because I don't actually believe any such person exists.
I think all of us, even the healthiest among us, could be even healthier and express more generative drive and more positivity for ourselves and for the world where we do that work.
So it's a lifelong.
There's no end point to that.
That's beautiful.
We can do that forever as long as we're here.
And you should.
Yeah.
I do believe, which is one of the reasons for having this discussion.

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Exactly.

Nonetheless, I have to imagine that there are also a lot of people out there, perhaps most people who still have a lot of work to do.

And those words a lot perhaps are in boldface, capital, underline, highlighted letters.

Right.

And as a consequence, we see relationships in the world that are not healthy.

What are some of those common unhealthy pairings?

I think it's worth spending at least a little bit of time on this.

Yeah.

Sure.

As we talk about this, I think that we should make a sort of somewhat simplified, but hopefully helpful distinction.

Right.

So there are people who are coming at coupling from primarily health.

Right.

And again, this isn't to criticize people who aren't coming at it from primarily health.

Right.

We all want to get to where we're coming at anything and everything from primarily health.

And there a lot of the problems are those simple things.

Like, well, I can't believe it didn't work out.

I play the trumpet and he plays the clarinet.

No, that wasn't a real set of factors.

That's why it didn't work out.

Like it's more in that realm.

It's not always just that, but like that kind of stuff is a big factor.

Right.

When we look in the other realm where, where there's a significantly problematic mental health issues.

Right.

Which, which people come by honestly, but need to face if life is going to get better.

Right.

There are two common paradigms there.

Now again, there are way more than two ways this can happen.

But I'm going to highlight two that we see a lot and maybe more than anything else in the, in the clinical setting.

So the first gets called repetition compulsion.

Right.

But it won't be very, very clear.

I do not believe that there is any such thing as a repetition compulsion.

A compulsion is something that one cannot control.

Right.

What's going on inside the person is very, very complicated when they're making decisions that lead to repeating a cycle.

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And those are things that can change.

Right.

And do not have to be compulsive.

So people are often struck by why a person is in the same bad relationship seemingly that they have always been in, but with a different name on the other person.

Right.

I mean, people will say this.

Like it's that person's fourth abusive relationship in a row.

And it seems to be just the same person with a different name.

Like that people say that a lot.

They say that about themselves.

They say that about others.

And it's very, very baffling.

I mean, you know, people have often been in my office very upset about that.

Like realizing they're repeating and they don't know and it's frightening.

And, you know, you can get a lot of fear and vulnerability from that, but there's a way of understanding that because our, our the limbic system, right?

The emotional parts of our minds don't care about the clock and the calendar.

Right.

So trauma impacts the whole brain, but trauma impacts the limbic system.

It creates strong negative emotion that then stays with us regardless of time.

It doesn't care about time.

Right.

So imagine our person gets in a relationship and the relationship starts to become abusive.

Right.

I mean, it's easy to say that and then move on to something else.

What's that like for that person?

What does that feel like when that person who they may have seen as a protector, a friend, right?

It is now cursing at them, denigrating them, pushing them, hitting them.

I mean, it's terrifying.

It's horrible.

Right.

So it is a deep impact, a traumatic impact on the person and a lot of the time, most of the time, like all trauma, it triggers shame.

Right.

So trauma triggers shame in us.

If the trauma is strong enough, it changes us as we move forward in the world.

And then we are different in a way that makes the past very immediate in the present.

So what the person then is trying to do, and there's been a lot of thought about this over the years and the fields to trying to understand this.

And I think in many ways doing a good job of understanding this, that the quote unquote petition compulsion is the drive, and I don't mean drive, like we're saying, there's a push

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inside the person to try and make that right, right?
With the idea that if that person can be in that situation again, right?
And I don't mean in the exact situation when someone raises a hand to them, but they can navigate a relationship because like they thought it was a good idea the first time.
So they don't want to feel like that was a very bad idea.
So I'm going to make it right.
And then I'm going to be okay.
And I'm going to be whole, right?
Because the person is driven by fear and vulnerability and the shame of the trauma, right?
So then they're trying to make it right because because the limbic system doesn't care about the clock or the calendar.
If you can make it right now, you make it right in the past, right?
Because that system doesn't care about the past.
It's driven by trauma.
So then the person's trying to figure out something that is different.
They're trying to choose that person, behave in the relationship.
They're trying to make things different, but they've selected for a dramatically high pretest probability of the same thing happening again, which is why, you know, if I could count the number of times that someone has said to me, oh, you're not going to help me, especially at the beginning of therapy.
There's no way you can help me, right?
My last five relationships were totally terrible.
Like I, there's no way there's no hope, right?
People have said that to me.
Someone has the last three, the last five, the last nine, and I will say back, if you tell me seven different stories of relationships with seven pretty different people, several different relationships as they evolved and the same really bad outcome, I'll agree with you, but you're not going to tell me that.
And that's why there's hope.
And no one has ever told me seven different stories.
I feel like, wow, you just can't do it.
Right?
No.
And again, even if there were seven, I'm saying same thing for exaggeration, right?
But there aren't, right?
What is it?
It's the same thing seven times.
That's what it is because the person is repeating.
And if they can understand the what and the why, why are they selecting?
How are they selecting someone?
What's going on inside of them?
We go back to the structure of self, the function of self.
We address what is there.

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Then that absolutely can change.
And then what will we talk about is that person then goes out to find another relationship.
Even if they said they never, never, never would again.
Like now they're making the decision to go out.
Is to say, what relationship are you looking for?
You're second.
You're the first one seven times, no harm, no foul.
But you can navigate the second because they're in a different place.
They're coming through agency and gratitude instead of denigrating themselves.
If you're, what's wrong with me?
What's wrong with everybody else?
Look, I'm here, right?
Even though some bad things have happened to me.
Look at what I can bring myself to bear.
I can go out there and try and find someone I can see with clear vision now.
There's agency, there's gratitude.
And then that person can go out and find relationship number two.
That's a really good one.
In the example you gave, it's very powerful and also very extreme,
an abusive relationship where someone is sadly getting hit or screamed at.
Oftentimes it seems people end up in repeated unsuccessful pairings,
meaning unhappy pairings of maybe someone who's like very strongly assertive.
Maybe we would say have a strong aggressive drive.
Some people might even call them a narcissist.
That phrase is thrown around a lot these days.
I mean, narcissist, gaslighting, like projection.
These phrases are thrown around all the time.
I think with frankly very little understanding of what they actually mean
unless they're coming from a qualified clinician.
Is it the case that somewhat passive or submissive people are drawn to narcissists?
Are narcissists drawn to submissive people?
I think these questions ring in a lot of people's minds.
If I could clarify something that I think I maybe could have said in a clear way,
you pointed out that the example I gave was a very strong one, an extreme one.
So as a physician, I think I naturally gravitate to the extreme circumstances
because they're the ones that bring the greatest risk, right?
But we are talking to people in those settings, right?
But most people are not in those extreme settings, right?
But that extreme serves as a model for how things that are less extreme can happen.
So when I think, right, we're sitting here talking to everyone across the spectrum
and most relationships that are not going well, thank goodness, are not going to be that extreme.
The repeated patterns aren't going to be that extreme.
But it's just as important to pay attention to a pattern where one person really is sort of more

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deferential

than they would like to be to the other than is comfortable to them.

And they're seeking someone ultimately who's just a little bit more assertive.

And that's not some disaster, but it cannot go well over time

where that person slowly gives up, say, more and more of themselves.

And there can be that repeated pattern.

You hear people say, yeah, it was a pretty good or pretty equal at the beginning.

But then, you know, I just had like less and less of a say or every, you know,

or, you know, then more and more, like I just became the whole relationship, right?

So it's no less important when it's less dramatic, right?

Because a relationship so goes in a wrong way.

When it's more dramatic, there's more risk, of course.

But most people are going to be in the less dramatic, but super important category.

And I think it's important to point that out to.

How much of what we're talking about is nested on people's deep, perhaps understandable desire to just make sure that the other person doesn't leave.

I mean, I can't tell you how many times I've heard about or observed relationships that from the outside it seemed really unhealthy.

But it also occurred to me that people are doing things on both sides of the relationship that ensure that the other person doesn't leave.

So I'm not talking about a physical trapping of someone in the environment.

I'm actually talking about the opposite.

I'm talking about somebody going against their better judgment

and doing things for the other person or against themselves or both.

Perhaps even in the context of what looks like healthy family,

like doing an excessive amount of raising of children or excessive amount of work to support the family, simply to ensure that the other person doesn't leave.

Here again, we can look across the spectrum.

So before this, you had talked about relationships that can be very unhealthy, like a narcissistic person and how can those relationships develop.

It's important that we touch on that in the context of this because that's sort of the extreme example.

So people who are narcissistic, meaning a narcissistic character structure,

now we're getting into the realm of significant psychiatric problems

and people who are narcissistic are exploitive.

They're a bottomless pit of need arising from vulnerability.

And yes, they can be helped.

And if someone out there thinks I'm narcissistic, then I'm not trying to be negative or mean.

Like you can get help and you can be better.

That's the whole point of what you and I are talking about here.

So people can change, but someone who's coming at the world

through a narcissistic character structure is exploitive of the other

and then can say survey a room and find that person who's at trauma,

such that that person is going to be desperate not to leave a relationship.

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And then they can exploit that person and often behave in awful ways and the other person won't leave.

Now, I'm giving an example.

It's not the case that way every, you know, every single time, but that's the dominant picture if you have a narcissistic person and who is that person more likely to pair with and then you sense the vulnerability, the desire for the other person not to leave. So, and that person would have to have then significant problems in themselves, like potentially instead of a pathological level of narcissism, a pathological level of dependence, for example.

So we're in the realm then of real problems.

And again, real problems can be treated and real problems can be improved.

And that's why we have clinical care,

but it can also serve as a model for seeing the ways that are less dramatic.

So there are many people who through the desire for the other person not to leave and we could call that attachment and security, right?

And maybe if we leave away the stereotype version of it, right?

The person doesn't feel securely attached to the other person, right?

And somewhere inside of them, they've learned that if they're more pleasing, right?

If they give up little parts of themselves, that person won't leave, right?

It might be because that's why their mother didn't leave their father when they think about it.

It might be that's why their father left their mother

because their mother wouldn't do that, right?

Whatever it may be, or it may be their own prior life experience,

or who knows something they read but forgot.

I mean, usually it's something more salient, not always,

but they've internalized something that leads to a compromise of the self.

Now, again, that's not what attachment and security is, right?

Attachment and security is just feeling some insecurity about the attachment.

So for example, I feel attachment and security about just about everything, right?

I've had the experience of sudden, very painful losses happening, right?

So I have attachment and security in the sense that I'm worried, right?

I get anxious about people going away and I can want to over control.

But I recognize this inside myself.

I try and do my best to say, look, I don't want that to make me unhealthy.

I want to recognize it.

I want to find some happy medium where I honor that in me,

and I carry it away with it to the point where I try and over control,

and then I push my relationships away, right?

So I say that because there's such a contrast between that kind of attachment and security, which can involve over control, right?

And the kind of attachment and security that can involve compromise of the self.

So we want to be very, very careful.

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We want to be careful.

What is a trauma bond and what does it mean?

We want to be careful.

What is attachment and security and what does it mean?

A certain kind of attachment and security can lead a person to make progressive compromises of self that are not good and healthy for them.

I'm curious about some of these unhealthy relationships from the other side, meaning from the side of the person who is, let's hope not, but in some cases exploited or who's being taken advantage of or in this scenario of a narcissistic person or an abusive person is the one who's taking the abuse.

Often it seems the victim in that scenario will be truly stuck in that situation.

They can't leave for financial reasons or kids or their own internal workings.

Their psychological machinery has them locked into that in some way.

And it's that locked in by psychological machinery that I'm interested in.

And I think a lot of people are interested in because from the outside, we just look at that and say, you know, why doesn't the person leave?

Why don't they just leave?

But clearly there's something about that situation that quote unquote works for them.

And by works for them, I don't mean that it's adaptive.

Clearly it's maladaptive, but that works for them.

The possibility I raised earlier perhaps is relevant here.

You know, maybe it works for them because they know that the narcissist gets some sort of internal reward for engaging this kind of dynamic and therefore won't leave.

And the other person not leaving is of more value to them than feeling safe even.

So it's a trading one form of safety for another.

Or perhaps the victim as we're calling them in this scenario is somebody who, you know, feels a great sense of reward by serving somebody more powerful than them.

This raises all sorts of interesting questions perhaps about power dynamics as well, which I certainly have questions about.

But what are some examples of the internal workings of such a person that reside within those bins of structure of self or function of self that would put someone into that sort of situation and lead them to stay in that kind of situation?

Yeah.

Well, any situation like that, if it's, as you say, working for a person, which at times, you know, we see that from the outside because like things continue to go along and things continue to go forward.

But that only works for someone if they don't have the understanding, the empowerment that we would wish for anyone and everyone to have.

So what is going on inside leads that person to feel a sense of an inability to change,

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you know, whether they can't see their way out of it or they kind of could but could never navigate to it. And there's a problem there if that's working for someone, right? Because we're talking about something that's exploitive, right? That's abusive, regardless of how it's abusive. And I think I believe that can only happen in the context of being demoralized, right? Or the circumstances of being so disempowered, right? You know, if someone just can't go 10 feet from home, like there are situations of outrageous amounts of oppression, right? Of a person where the person just cannot choose differently. And there are situations where we as stewards of all of us, where the government may intervene, for example, ideally, right? If someone would come in and help that person. But barring that kind of outlier, a person would only be in that situation in the context of being demoralized. And that demoralization would come from too low a drive for assertion, being proactive, aggression, right? That that drive, its realization is too low. And if we give people the understanding and we give them the help, the means, they don't have to stay in abusive situations. Like we see this in situations where our society will intervene or someone helpful will intervene. Some person or entity will intervene and help a person, help that person to understand what's going on inside of them that leads them to feel that things can't be better, they can't do better, or that they're not worth better, or whatever that may be, and help them to find the empowerment to then navigate themselves out of the situation. And here again, I think it's not just agency, but it's agency plus gratitude, right? Including gratitude for having a self that could leave a situation. When people are in situations like that, you know, we talk about people as beaten down, you know, it's a way to kind of capture like what I think that feels like and how much suffering there is in those situations to be in that place and to not have the agency to get out of it, then the person is not feeling a sense of gratitude for self, right? They feel so bad about self that there's nothing to be grateful for, right? And there is so much to be grateful for, right? I mean, we could go through any person in a situation like that and we could list wonderful things about that person, adaptive things about that person, kind things about that person, diligent things. There are things like that in every person. But if the person can't see that, they can't attach to that,

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they can't have the agency and gratitude,
then they stay in a situation that is really defined by the agency and gratitude
and therefore that aggressive assertion proactive drive
being expressed at such a low level.

I can see how a healthy relationship could exist in relative isolation,
you know, not complete isolation, you know,
and here again I'm referring to or thinking about a romantic relationship.

You can see how a healthy romantic relationship could exist in relative isolation,
you know, a few friends, some contact with family members
or in great connectivity with friends and family and neighbors, etc.
and still be a really great romantic relationship.

I can also see how the sorts of relationships that we happen to be focusing on at this moment,
which are this unhealthy dynamics,
are made far worse by lack of connectivity to outsiders.

In fact, a previous guest on this podcast was David Boss,
who's a professor of evolutionary psychology down at the University of Texas, Austin,
and he talked about some of his research into the dark triad.

These are narcissistic, Machiavellian, sometimes also sociopathic individuals
and how that plays out in romantic relationships.

And it's a terrible thing, but an important thing to understand
given the unfortunate frequency that that occurs.

But one of the things that I remember so clearly from that discussion with David Boss
was that even when there isn't sociopathy or a strong desire to destroy the other,
that in these sorts of relationships there's often an attempt to isolate the person.
You know, first by isolating them from their family, also from friends and coworkers,
but all with the goal of convincing that person that no one else would want them
as a way to make them, quote, unquote, voluntarily stay.

In other words, to undermine their sense of safety,
to ramp up their sense of anxiety, except in the presence of that individual.

And, you know, I'm remembering that now because, you know,
as we're talking about why wouldn't somebody just leave?

Why wouldn't they just tap into that agency and gratitude?

It's clear that the oppressor in this kind of relationship
has a real incentive to try and undermine agency and gratitude
because, of course, with those they would be revealed for what they are
and the person would feel unable to leave.

Taking us back once again to the critical need to cultivate agency and gratitude,
not just in unhealthy but certainly in healthy relationships.

Right. I mean, I think the principle here is that darkness always favors the oppressor.

So the oppressor wishes for darkness.

So you want to isolate that person, right?

Because when people see that things are better for someone else,
they realize things can be better, right?

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When people are told by someone that they're worthwhile, or they're funny, or they're pretty, or they're smart, or whatever the case may be, they may take that inside, right? You know, they may take inside, oh, maybe I am. You know, I'm handsome and smart, maybe. Or they start thinking about that. They're very basic concepts that allow a person to entertain new ways to look at themselves, right? So the person who's oppressing wants that person to live in darkness. They don't want them to see that there can be better. They don't want them to be directly told that they're better than how things are. And that same darkness on the outside, say the lights are out around the relationship, is the goal of the oppressor on the inside. Now again, the oppressor may know this and be doing it consciously, but often this gets played out in unconscious ways, like the constant denigration of someone. A person isn't saying inside, gosh, I'm trying to reduce their agency, their aggressive drive really down to zero, right? But that's what they're doing. Somewhere inside, there's a knowing of that, even if it's an unconscious knowing. And then the impact of that kind of abuse over time is a lower and lower and lower ability to bring oneself to bear. Less proactive, aggressive, assertive, lower sense of agency and gratitude. That's really the definition of being demoralized, right? And that kind of abuse is always promoting demoralization because demoralization is the darkness on the inside, right? Just as envy is too, right? Demoralization is a form of darkness on the inside. Envy is no less dark. Envy may be a lot more active, right? But in both cases, there's no knowledge, there's no growth, there's no wisdom, there's no learning, right? So they're the states of darkness. And what can happen in a way that's really so tragic to think about is you often can have an abuser, an oppressor, who is living in total darkness inside, living through the lens of envy. And then you can have a person who is being oppressed, who is being exploited, who is living in darkness, but they're living in the darkness of demoralization. And that's a very sad thing to say, to imagine, and it's been a very, very sad thing to see, right? Because if you do clinical psychiatry for long enough, you see a lot of this. And it doesn't have to be this way. Even the people who are oppressing have it within them the majority of time to make things better. And we do see that. I took care of a man a long time ago who had been terribly abusive to his family.

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And it was always unclear to me, it had happened years before, that he just understood. And again, I never understood what happened that he got it, and the man really made change. Like again, I don't know what the circumstance was that made that motivation in him, but he went back and looked at himself, and he went back and looked at how his father oppressed and terrorized the family, and how he just did it with automatically, right? Because what was rooted in his own fear of vulnerability and he's going to lose his family and not be a man anymore, unless he oppresses them, like he recognized all of it in him, and he had changed it so dramatically. He had removed himself from the family system. And when I got to know him, it was years later, and he was reintegrating back into the system, because there had been such prolonged change, and he had communicated to the family his understanding of self. So it's not impossible. Even someone who is abusing, oppressing, coming through a narcissistic character structure, there's no therapeutic nihilism here, right? Things can change, and things can change in the oppressor, which isn't excusing that, right? I mean, a person who's doing things is morally culpable, right? They often are criminally, legally culpable, so that is all true, just as the ability to change is true. And then the person we think about more commonly in this situation, of course, is the person who's being oppressed, and there can be change there too, but a problem is how hard it can be, the impact of the isolation, right? And also the dearth of resources to really help people. It's an actual true story of a woman who, I believed with all my heart, could get out of the cyclic abusive situation she was in if she had a carburetor. She had a carburetor, right? She had a car. The car didn't function. She had a place to go, right? Where others wouldn't know that she was there. And the problem was just a few hundred dollars to change the carburetor, but there's like, there's no place to go. There's no resources, and we as a society don't help people. Now, it may be that someone helped that woman and got her a carburetor and she drove away, right? But it shows how we can bring ourselves to bear as a society to offer people help, which sometimes is like the lifeline the person needs. And maybe that person really needs a safe house or something very dramatic, or they need a carburetor to get away from being terrorized. But a lot of times it's just community support structures, right? Good structures around people in communities that can offer them support in situations that may be less dramatic.

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Opportunities for interconnection, which sometimes people can find through social venues or through religiously affiliated venues.

But the idea that community support systems on all levels make a huge difference.

That's how there's another level, right, beyond the relationship, right?

It's the society, it's the culture, right?

And that's how we, on that next level of emergence, beyond the individual relationships, can foster goodness, can foster health in each and every one of us.

How do some of these same dynamics play out in non-romantic relationships?

So for instance, in the workplace, I was weaned in academic laboratories.

So what's most familiar to me are, gosh, unfortunately, numerous examples where people working in laboratories, not the same as mine, because I've been very fortunate to have amazing, benevolent mentors, quirky and outrageous at times, but benevolent nonetheless.

But others around me have been in laboratories where, for instance, the workload was just ridiculously high.

Like the demand far exceeded what any person could do.

And if somebody had, God forbid, a cold or children,

like it was near impossible to impossible that they could meet the standard there.

Or stress dynamics, pressure cooker dynamics that made it what anyone would call a toxic environment.

You see this also in law firms, you see it in companies, you see it in families, you see it in friendship circles, right?

I mean, how many movies are about teens pressing one another through bullying and ridicule and practical jokes that are anything but funny, right?

That are downright destructive, okay, and on and on.

And so often the victims in these cases, if it's not a Hollywood movie,

feel as if that's their only choice because to leave is to essentially have no other options, right?

It's not that that's the only option is to stay,

it's that to leave is essentially to leave science,

because these people in positions of power have the louder voice, they have the megaphone, they write the letters of recommendation, the law firms, people talk.

As I kind of spool this out in a long form question, I'm realizing I can't think of a single exception.

Like as long as there are going to be people interacting and people talking about their interactions and people in positions of power, this sort of dynamic is going to take place.

Absolutely. Anytime you have a closed system without accountability, you're just rolling the dice for that kind of oppression, right?

We need accountability.

Think about theoretically what should have happened there, right?

There should be higher order accountability, right?

Whether it's in a company or university or wherever it may be,

there should be higher order accountability that is reasonable and rational.

So it's not then acting in a top-down way that would be over-controlling, right?

Telling you exactly what you kind of can't say or what you kind of can't do.

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Sometimes there's too much rigidity that can be enacted top-down, but the problem runs both ways. If there's no accountability from the bottom up, then that person is just simply stuck, right? Why? Because the system we've put into place has failed, right? And this is where we're talking now about not just individual relationships with two people relationships, but now we start talking about systems of people, and systems of people are another level of emergence with a personality, so to speak, an environment all their own. You can know everything there is to know about each person in the system. You don't know about the system. But what you do know is that accountability is necessary. I mean, probably if we added up all the examples in history, we'd have to talk about them over a thousand years, right? I mean, how many examples do we have that closed systems without accountability are just rolling the dice, they breed oppression? This is true, and I've been at several different places, so I'm not trying to implicate this any one place versus another, but I was part of a medical treatment team. So this is a hierarchical medical treatment team of maybe seven people, give or take one depending upon the circumstances, where there was physical abuse going on in the treatment team. It's true, and I'm not saying this in some exaggerated manner where somebody brushed up too close to someone and they slipped, no hurting someone on the treatment team, right? Two different people who are being hurt by someone seen here. So this is, is it a major university in a clinical setting, right? And it's not, again, it's not like that's the be-all and end-all, but you think about the alleged, the sophistication of the people in the system, the alleged empowerment of the people in the situation, which did not put a stop to that. So we need to have accountability. The accountability has to be reasonable. It doesn't mean over control, but it doesn't mean under control either. And if that person is being overworked as you described with no way of winning or harmed on a, you know, on a medical team, and there's no way that that person can change that, the system has failed that person and failed them dramatically. And guess who suffers? Everyone does, right? That person suffers, right? And the science that's being done or the medical care that's being provided is important to all of us. Anyone could be the patient who is being taken care of by the team

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where one person is hurting a couple of the others.

You think that medical care is going to be optimized, right?

Is the science going to be optimized that we're utilizing to try and make our lives better, live longer, be in less pain?

No, what's happening there is envy.

That person who's oppressing other people is driven by envy, whether it's a narcissistic character structure that acts almost exclusively through envy, or it's envy that is in this person's life in this way or not another way.

Does it matter, right?

What's going on there is envy and envy is nothing but destructive, right?

The generative drive is nothing but productive.

Envy is nothing but destructive.

Could you remind for people that perhaps may not have heard episodes one and two yet that envy is perhaps not just a desire to be like somebody else.

That envy in the context that we're discussing here is something quite possibly different. Right.

And there's a varying lexicon, which is why it is important to define it because I think people learn it in different ways.

I've heard it talked about in different ways.

So to define that, there's a difference between jealousy and envy.

And again, we could choose different words, but this is the way I learned it that's been most impactful where jealousy is benign, right?

It's the idea that if I see that you have something that I don't, then I think, oh, well, maybe I could work harder and get that thing, right?

Or if I can't have that thing, like maybe it's a person is younger, right?

Okay, I can't make myself younger.

Then I can think, okay, like, you know, through a lens of gratitude, is that the only thing about me, right?

I can't think of anything good about myself, right?

Other than maybe I could be younger.

I mean, if you come at that through the lens of health, it's like, it's okay, right?

It can serve to motivate people to like try harder, work harder, take a look at themselves and be more accepting of who they are and what their circumstances in life and what kind of control they can enact and what kind they can't.

It's okay, right?

Envy is different, right?

Envy comes at that problem from the perspective that bringing down the other person, right, is just as effective as bringing up the self.

That's why envy is destructive.

So someone who might see another person and they envy them, their youth, right?

They envy, they want that and they want to bring that person down, right?

Because I can't make myself younger, but then they realize I can't make that person older either,

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but they can do other things to them, right?

They can sexually harass them, maybe.

They can make terrible jokes that are really insulting and humiliating, maybe, right?

There are all sorts of things a person can do to bring down someone else.

An action of envy is destructive.

And I truly believe this.

People who come at the world very strongly through envy,

by and large in narcissistic character structure,

this is a small percentage of the population,

but that small percentage does most of the damage on earth, right?

It's a strong thing to say,

but when I think about studying political science and thinking about history

and learning medicine and learning about psychiatry and sociology

and really trying to look at the world and thinking what drives a person on a medical team

who's gotten to be a senior physician to physically hurt doctors lower on the hierarchy envy, right?

That person feels terrible about themselves and then is being destructive to those people.

That same thing is at work in the lab,

the same thing is at work when people start wars of destruction

that just simply harm other people and we can see no other sense of it.

That from the individual setting all the way up to the world setting,

we see the destruction of envy and we also see it inside of us

because a person who's enacting envy in the world around them is never happy.

There's no chance of happiness.

Hence the idea of a bottomless pit, right?

Whatever you get, let's say an envious person who wants more money.

I want to have more money than anybody, right?

I want everyone to have less money than me, right?

Rather than they come at the world through the lens of greed,

when they get more money, how long does that make them happy?

This doesn't mean money is bad or having money is bad.

It just means if you're coming at the world through the lens of envy

and that lens is specifically focused on money,

then you'll be a greedy person who is never satisfied even if you have \$10 trillion, right?

So it's never good.

It takes away from that person any possibility of happiness.

And if you see people work with people with a narcissistic character structure,

there can be a sense of a very brief happiness in the moment.

Like, I'm happy because I realize I have something someone else doesn't.

I'm happy because I'm thinking of myself.

And even though I feel very insecure and vulnerable inside,

I have a whole set of defense mechanisms that let me turn those tables around

and then feel good about myself in a way that places me above others.

Whatever is going on in that person,

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it may bring some very brief gratification in the moment, but that's not happiness.

Hence the need for the gratification over and over and over again.

Narcissistic people are the least secure, most different people on earth.

They just have a phenomenally healthy defensive structure

that comes about in order to try and protect them

that leads them to go to the opposite.

Some of what's called a reaction formation, going to the very opposite,

denial, avoidance, rationalization, projection, very unhealthy defenses

that then leads that person to protect themselves from any help

while they are frantically trying to gain some goodness

that makes them feel good for a split second and then disappears forever.

Hence the tremendous predilection for destruction.

How do you and how should we think about power dynamics in relationships?

Perhaps starting with romantic relationships.

I've heard it said before that there's always power dynamics in relationships of all kinds.

I don't know if that's true or not, but I've heard that.

And I've also heard that that's particularly salient in romantic relationships,

independent of whether or not it's a homosexual or heterosexual relationship

that there's always to some extent or another one leader and one follower.

This is an interesting, perhaps a controversial idea,

but I've heard it enough times that I want to know more about it.

Sure. So power dynamics, of course, very important,

but also something we tend to be so over reductionist about.

And this idea that there's always a leader and there's always a follower.

Every single relationship, right? That's true on balance.

We tend to be so reductionist.

And then what we do is we miss the real power dynamics that are going on.

Just like I said in a previous episode, I think my math minor has helped me the most for all of life.

I think a power dynamics course that I took as an undergraduate in political science

has helped me the most as a psychiatrist, took it long before medical school,

because that class taught me so much about power dynamics.

I thought it was going to be about overt power.

Who has power over whom and tells whom to do what, right?

But what I learned is so much of power dynamics are covert.

They're under the surface.

For example, they're the things that are not said, something that was called at the time,

at least the issue of the non-issue, right?

Where there's an issue between two people like this person never takes out the garbage.

That person always takes out the garbage.

That person is resentful about it.

Both of them know, but the person who always does it can't say so,

because if they say so, the first person will punish them in some other way, right?

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By not taking out the garbage, then the place smells.

That person goes to work and the person who's at home has to take it out, right?

That's one example of the issue of the non-issue.

Other examples are where someone is looking and smiling and being really nice to someone who they know is going to physically harm them if they bring to light that they're actually not happy and don't feel good about that person, right?

So from the dramatic to the non-dramatic, unstated power dynamics are going on all over the place and they're in every single relationship.

I mean, unless a person is in a relationship with someone else and they're both comatose.

Now, I guess only one of them has to be comatose, right?

There are power dynamics going on, but again, it doesn't mean that they're unhealthy, right?

Because there are always power dynamics.

So then what are we looking for?

And again, there are a lot of things we could look for, but we could talk about really two primary things.

One is look for the non-obvious and two is the give and take.

So the first, even in our own relationships, because it's interesting how many people will, say, talk about the power dynamics in their relationship.

They're not always saying, here are the power dynamics in my relationship,

but they're telling me about them and they're telling me about the things that are overt, right?

Now, somewhere inside of them, they know that, you know, they can't really raise issue A, B, or C, or there'll be some retribution, whether it's small or large, or they might even know everything's okay

and that person is happy, but they know I'm not giving them room to say that they're not happy.

And that could just mean, you know, if they say they're not happy, then I'll come home a couple hours late the next day

and that person will feel some attachment and security because of that.

And, you know, there are all sorts of ways this can play out,

but since so much of power dynamics are unstated or covert,

kind of like the iceberg of conscious and unconscious, there's an iceberg of power dynamics.

So to think about, including in one's own relationships, whether it's a neighbor, it's a friend,

it's a work relationship, or most charged, it's romance, what's really going on between us, right?

What's really going on between us?

I'm not looking to tell myself lies, right?

I know that I may not be able to understand all of it, but let me stop and think about it.

And people, if you ask people to stop and do that, they can say, yeah, this is really not okay.

Or, you know, because sometimes they don't know that it's there or they don't want to know that it's there.

And the therapy work is trying to guide them to there's an immense power disparity, maybe, in the relationship

when they're presenting.

No, everything is equal.

It's a good supportive relationship.

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You hear that a lot.

And of course, it's not always that there's something bad under the surface, but a lot of times there is.

And even something mildly bad is not okay and can cause problems, and sometimes there's something very bad.

So look for the non-obvious.

And then the second is that give and take is a very good sign of health.

It is a very good sign of health.

So if a person can kind of see that there's give and take, and it might be about something as simple as like,

who chooses where we go to dinner?

Okay, you know, sometimes one, sometimes the other depends who has a stronger feeling, or it may be that person always decides where we go to dinner, but the other person's okay with it, right?

And that person always decides what movie they want.

The other person, right?

So the idea that there's give and take, and then in periods of time where one person may be in a more difficult place,

one person has a significant loss, right?

Or an injury or an illness, then you see that that shifts a little bit.

One person is giving more, right?

But then ultimately the idea is that's from the outside, right?

If one person is giving more to the other, there's a generosity of spirit in both the giving and the accepting, right?

That leads them to then be stronger together.

So even when people say, well, they're imbalances.

In some way, if you just look at what's going on day to day,

but in a healthy relationship with high generative drive, the periods of imbalance strengthen the relationship.

You see this with friends where two people have a pretty equal friendship,

and then one person has something difficult happens, and the other person is there for them.

What's true on the other side of that?

They're better friends, right?

And it's also why we often want to be interconnected when we're healthy.

What if something bad happens to both of them?

It's good to be interconnected, and friends and family can be supportive to us.

So the idea that give and take is healthy, I think, is very central.

So just looking for evidence.

That's often, if I don't understand what's going on in the relationship,

maybe it's early in the therapy or it's just been kind of opaque or I can't figure it out,

I'm looking for is there a give and take because I'm going to think,

okay, more likely than not, things are healthy.

If I see an imbalance, whether the person knows it or not,

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I'm thinking more likely than not, it's unhealthy.
And then there are just clues along the pathway of my efforts to understand.
The non-obvious piece is really intriguing, as is the give and take.
And I really appreciate that you brought up the give and take,
because that's a very concrete place that we can all look and ask ourselves.
Even if people aren't in romantic relationships,
what is the give and take in a given friendship?
And as you mentioned earlier, it doesn't have to be scripted one for one, one for one.
Maybe it balances out over time or maybe it doesn't.
I mean, I've had friendships that have lasted many decades even,
where I can honestly say I'm always the person to reach out to the other person.
But when they connect, they connect with such a depth of attention
that I don't feel any deprivation whatsoever.
In fact, I don't think I've ever considered that I'm the person that always reaches out until today.
And so it doesn't bother me whatsoever.
I feel infinitely rewarded in the relationship, like it's generative.
It feels generative.
It doesn't have to be equal, however one wants to define equal,
but it has to be mutual.
You're getting, you know, you're feeling goodness from the relationship.
So is the other person.
Okay.
That's good.
That's coming from that high generative place.
And when we really, let's say we push that concept forward to where we want to be living,
not some pie in the sky, right?
But agency and gratitude as verbs.
The generative drive is very strongly expressed.
And the other drives are subserving the generative drive.
Then we get to the place where we really see it is true that it is better to give than to receive.
The happiest people I see are the people who are giving.
Now, of course it feels great to receive, right?
But it feels better to give because there's a goodness in the self, in the giving.
And I remember seeing this as a child and being too young to understand it,
but I was a little kid, I liked getting things, right?
And as a little kid, I liked getting things more than I liked giving.
It's okay when you're a little kid.
But what I did observe is that my maternal grandmother who is very sweet and loving and caring,
she loved giving, right?
You give her presents and we did and she liked, she really liked getting presents.
She loved giving, right?
There was an excess of goodness.
And then as I got older and I learned more like who she had been in the community

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and how she had been to people.

And I could see and now through the lens that there was such goodness in her.

For me, she's the shining model of goodness that I internalize as I aspire to be better.

So then I think I want to be like that.

I am more generative as I try and think more about giving than receiving.

I'm not trying to say I'm some noble person or I'm being ascetic.

I think that's a good way for us all to feel, right?

Or someone, a very, very successful person that I consult with is in my life.

Who has talked about how he always makes inside of himself the best understanding of what's going on

between him and another person, whether it's a very big financial deal,

or it's about power or it's personal and then gives a little bit always.

Where have we ended up?

Let me give a little bit, right?

And there's a person who's very, very successful, very, very happy, right?

But I would argue the goodness in him is why he's successful and happy.

It's not that he's successful and therefore he's happy, right?

It's what's inside of him that fosters both of those good things

and he could be just as happy without the big success.

Maybe he wasn't minded to do that and he grows a nice garden.

Like he could be equally happy, but the point is the goodness in self to be able to do that, right?

To feel good about doing that.

I feel better about giving that than I would have receiving that.

That's pretty stark, right?

It's something given to the other that I would have gotten right now

and we're in maybe a negotiation to give it feels better than to have it.

I'm sure there are many people thinking about individuals who are highly successful, who are not givers, who are takers.

I do think those examples of takers, as I'm calling them, grab a lot of attention.

But I know, at least within science and the other domains of life I've been in,

that there are far more successful people who are also givers, even to a great extent.

And of course, that doesn't mean that they're giving to the point of an inability to give further or to take care of themselves.

The giving is part of taking care of themselves, but it's part of this generative cycle.

It's not one thing.

It's not a tit for tat.

It's part of something that makes them feel good, makes others feel good.

It's sort of anti-transactional.

And as we're talking about the self and interrelations between selves in these different relationship contexts today,

this word transactional keeps coming to mind.

And what I'm so aware of as you're describing what healthy selves and healthy relationships look like,

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is that it runs counter to pretty much everything that I've heard and that we hear in the world about relationships

and about the relationship to self, meaning it's not transactional.

It's really about a cycle.

And we're using this word generative over and over in its specific context today.

So I don't want to rob that word for a different purpose, but I'm imagining a sort of upward spiral in my mind,

or perhaps something that's really like a circle of life that just keeps growing bigger and bigger and bigger.

Maybe we could talk a little bit about this notion of relationships being transactional.

I mean, it's such a loaded word, but I have a close friend who's married with more than a few children who told me the other day.

I realized that it's all kind of transactional.

Like they're extracting from me and I'm extracting from them and it's benevolent because it's all good.

And I thought, wow, this is really dreadful.

No one wants to think that the closest relationships in their lives are transactional.

And he was coming to that conclusion.

I disagreed with him and I don't know where that all sits for him right now,

but maybe we could talk about the transactional versus non-transactional aspects of relationship because we all want things.

That's perfectly healthy, I believe.

We all experience disappointment and pleasure and relief and sometimes major disappointment, pleasure, relief, etc.

But what is the role of transaction in relationships?

And how does psychiatry, how do you and how should we think about that?

We often get confused because there are transactions in every relationship, but that does not mean that every relationship is transactional.

So if we think about what transactions are, we can think of the stereotypical way.

So it can also be like, here's the transaction, I'll do the dishes and you wash the clothes.

Right.

Or for instance, I'll make the money and the other person will raise the children.

Right.

So there are transactions, right?

But that does not mean that the be all and end all of it are sort of hard-hearted, calculated transactions.

And transactions also occur in less obvious but equally important ways.

Right.

So another way that transactions occur is, so right now I'm putting something out there, right?

Because I'm saying something, right?

And then at a point I stop and I'm waiting for you to put something out there.

And then I take in what you said and we're doing something that in that sense is transactional.

I'm waiting for you to give me something.

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I take it in, I process it, I give something back out to you.

But that's not the be all and end all of it.

So there are transactions, whether it's the, you know, who's going to wash the dishes, who's going to do the clothes,

or it's what do I put out there that you take in and what do you put out there that I take in, that there is something greater than, something beyond the transactional.

And there is some controversy to this, a thought that there really are a historical thought in the field that there are just aggressive and pleasure drives in us and that everything is transactional.

And again, we don't really have a way of disproving that.

I mean, there's not going to be some equation that disproves that, but I think it's entirely disproven by human experience.

And there's so many, you know, we could talk about an infinite number of resources to consider this, but just imagine the writings of Victor Frankl and the writings and the theories around human interactions

and psychological theories that have come of it to think that everything is just transactional.

It's a denial of the humanness in all of us that I think he just brought to the fore so strongly.

But again, there could be nearly infinite resources throughout human history that say, hey, we're not entirely transactional.

It's not just aggression and pleasure, but there's something more going on here.

There's learning that feels good for the sake of learning.

There's kindness that feels good for the sake of kindness.

There's giving that feels good because giving feels good.

Like this is going on in us.

It's going on when we're like loving children, for example, or loving animals.

There's something inside of us that's not just transactional.

And that's why I think what we're talking about is if it's truth, it should all hang together, right?

It must all hang together.

And this is why there's an us over top of each individual that's in a relationship.

This is why you can know everything about me, you can know everything about you, and you can know nothing about our friendship.

Absolutely nothing because it's something different.

And if it were all just transactional, there would be nothing different.

And I think our experience as human beings, I know that to be true

because I just know that I don't always feel selfish about things, right?

Like maybe sometimes I do and I do something nice because it'll make me look good.

Like, okay, we're all human, right?

But I know that there's good feeling from others towards me at times.

It's just about the good feeling.

I know that there's that from me towards others.

So that tells us, yes, there is something other than just the I.

There is the we of dyads, right?

Of relationships and no matter whether they're work, family, friendship, relationship, and then there are the levels beyond that that are larger we's, right?

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The we of groups.

So if I understand correctly, it can be the case that one person makes the majority or all the income for a family.

The other person raises the children, takes care of the majority of the home.

And of course, there is a transaction there, a set of transactions, but that it's in service to something larger that really isn't transactional.

I'm just stealing your words here.

But if I were to expand on that just to make sure I understand that the non-transactional thing that emerges from that is generative because it's a family, right?

It's a family that everyone can extract growth and pleasure and meaning from.

And just because the roles are divided as such,

it doesn't necessarily mean that the relationship is defined as transactional in the sense that it's less than it could be.

Right.

Right.

If you think about what's really being transacted.

So let's say one person is out in the world and is making an income.

The other person is taking care of the family and taking care of the home.

What's being transacted?

Well, the person who's making the money is sharing the money, right?

In that sense, transacting some of the money to the other person.

Like you get to have some of it too.

You get to have some of the benefit from it.

And the person who is at home, who's taking care of the family in the home, saying you get to have some of that too, right?

You get to come, the children are taken care of, right?

The home is taken care of.

So both are transacting something to the other, right?

I mean, that's the truth of it, right?

If you look at what's really going on there,

one person is getting benefit of money they didn't earn.

The other person is getting benefits they have child care they didn't do or pay for, right?

They're not paying for child care.

They're sharing resources, right?

So yes, that's true.

But is that it?

I mean, are these two robots, right?

One is the money making robot and the other is the child care robot.

Like that's not what's going on, right?

The way we want to envision that if we have two healthy people with generative drives is they love one another.

They're creating something better than they could create on their own.

In fact, they've created children, right?

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They've created a home together and they're nurturing that family together.
That is generative and because it's generative, it can also be flexible.
So let's say the person who's at home says,
I need to do some things outside of the house, right?
Or let's say the person who's out working thinks,
I feel overwhelmed and I like to switch to a better job.
But that job's half time.
I want to be, I could be half in the house, right?
Like this is where people can come together, right?
In the same way we talked about the two and an eight on the sex drive or sexuality scale
where people then can find compromises, right?
And if one really wants to stay out of the home all the time,
but the person in the home wants to leave the home,
well, they find a way that that works, right?
Because they're care for one another.
The generative spirit that is in them individually and as a couple lets them nurture that.
And one isn't interested in oppressing the other.
I'm not going to leave my job.
You stay at home or I'm staying at home.
You stay out there.
It's like, okay, let's, let's think about things.
Let's, let's communicate, right?
That's how the generative drive not only like makes that awesome, right?
Like the five isn't the compromised position between the eight and the two.
The five is awesome, right?
Here, the transactional aspects are awesome because of the generative aspects
of what comes of it far more than either of those people could make on their own.
I mean, one would say it's not so obvious.
Maybe if one makes X amount of dollars, each could make half X.
That's not what we're talking about.
Neither of them can create that family on their own.
It seems that so much of what we're talking about relies on, you know,
the hallmarks that we always hear make up good relationships of all kinds.
Romantic and otherwise.
Like things like communication, listening, generosity, okay.
All the stuff that we all know that we should bring to relationship and hopefully are getting from
relationships.
And that if we're not, that we should probably request from others in polite ways.
Can I say, can I have one word for that?
Kindergarten, right?
Think about that.
We learned that in kindergarten.
What you're describing is so simple, right?

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That's why it's so high up on the, this is what the geyser is pushing up.

It's high up from the two pillars, right?

Because what you're talking about is simple generosity of spirit giving rather than taking, right?

Being kind to others, letting things go, feeling good about yourself, even if you fall down, right?

We learned this in kindergarten.

So we must somewhere inside of us really value it, right?

But then we let it go.

We make things overly complex.

And, you know, this, this idea that in many ways we should go back to kindergarten, right?

Because there's a purity there, right?

Children in age where, you know, they can learn and then we bring a nice kind of learning to them and a nurturing to them.

And we can bring it to ourselves too, so that we simplify that which has become overly complex, right?

We simplify because trauma makes complexity.

Having to just make one's way in the world is complicated, right?

So things are more and more complicated and we lose the simple roots of goodness or the goodness of simplicity, right?

And we can come back to that.

So I couldn't resist when you said, oh, these are kind of simple, these basic things, right?

Like, right, that's the point of it because that's our agency and gratitude and the generative drive.

That's where they live in the simplicity.

I'm glad you mentioned kindergarten.

It brought me back to images of kindergarten where, yeah, as far as I can remember now, there were all the critical components of a great generative environment.

You know, adults who really cared about us.

Fortunately, there were snack time with oranges or nourishing food.

Right.

There was nap time in the afternoon.

Right.

Like these things are all things that I think.

You got some exercise, explore.

You can take a guinea pig home on the weekends.

Yes.

This guinea pig.

I think they actually, I think there were several guinea pigs, but they kept trying to convince us it was the same guinea pig.

Because they would allow one family to take home the guinea pig each weekend.

And sometimes I think it didn't work out quite so well.

But anyway, the guinea pig was a pervasive feature.

So you learn to take care of things.

And in all seriousness, now that I step back from it, there's nothing more generative, it seems, than a kindergarten classroom environment.

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Or we should say a healthy kindergarten classroom environment.

It's all about support of others.

And if we go to the pillars, the structure of self and the function of self, I mean, surely there's a lot going on at home too.

But think about like what salient it's learning, messages of self, you know, self confidence, like instilling those.

It's behaviors that are based on strivings and hopefulness.

Yes.

It's all the good things.

Yes.

All the good things.

And so, you know, as I was thinking about communication and all these good things that clearly kindergarten is a wonderful template for in all seriousness, I think is an amazing template.

I'm thinking about what gets in the way.

And of course trauma can get in the way.

And we should talk about that more.

But it seems to me that one of the things that gets in the way of asking for what we want of hearing requests of us in the way that is going to bring about the most generative goodness is anxiety.

It's like, you know, you're tired from a long day and someone mentions like, you know, we have to take the trash out.

You know, like, I was at work all day, like, you know, that kind of thing.

Or earlier talking about the issue of the non issue in terms of power dynamics, you know, that well, let's just say I've had the experience before in relationship of feeling like if I make a request or I have a quote unquote complaint about something that the other person is going to be so upset about the fact that they didn't do something well.

That's going to be three days of just like diminished happiness for everybody.

So I just assumed like not deal with it, right?

So when we hear the word anxiety, I think we often about the person like quaking about, you know, public speaking or like getting the circuits in their brain hijacked that we're only designed for saber tooth tigers.

But you know, anxiety seems to serve both a very important functional role in modern life that has nothing to do with physical threat.

But it also seems to be the feature that if not kept in check, if we can't regulate our own anxiety, I'm realizing there's no way that we're going to be in a position to ask for what we need and what we want to hear what's needed of us and what others want.

In other words, anxiety seems like a major barrier to the generative drive.

I think the place to start is if you show me a person who has no anxiety, I'll show you a mannequin, right?

We all have anxiety in us.

Remember, it's just a word, right?

What are we getting at?

We're getting at a sense of tension, right?

A sense of disquiet inside of us that we would like to solve.

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We would like to ease if we could.

It is not helpful or healthy if we have very, very low levels of that, right?

Because then our strivings are certainly going to suffer, right?

There's not a lot of motivation, right?

To go make change in the world, change in our lives, right?

So if we have too little of that tension, that doesn't go well.

And that maps to a low assertiveness, right?

Aggression, proactive drive.

There are other ways that could show itself, but it maps very clearly, I think, to that.

And that's not good for us.

On the other end of the spectrum, we're much more concerned with the other end of the spectrum because a lot of anxiety feels very, very bad and it feels very bad right now, right?

So our high levels of anxiety, they narrow our cognitive spectrum.

They narrow our ability to think about what's going on around us, to think about ourselves.

So the idea with anxiety is to recognize, hey, we all have it and we can call it anxiety,

we can call it tension, we can call it whatever we want to,

but we want that to be in a healthy place, right?

Which comes, of course, back to the self, that if my levels of anxiety are very high and therefore it's causing problems in my relationship,

like maybe I'm always asking my partner if we're okay, right?

That happens a lot.

Like, are we okay?

Are you happy, right?

Because there's a lot of anxiety in me.

Like the first place to go is to look at myself so we could say, oh, I have attachment and security.

That's just stating the obvious, right?

Sorry to interrupt, but a very common one nowadays that I think is new in the course of human history

is that tugging the line phenomenon, you text somebody,

because you're thinking about them, you don't hear back, and then attention starts to mount.

And then depending on the context, you may either be concerned about the person or even suspicious about what the person is up to.

I mean, here it's very contextual, right?

And it depends on the history of both individuals and that relationship.

But then the person will reach back eventually and it either will bring relief or relief with some resent, like, where were you?

What happened?

You know, this is very, very common.

It's so much so, in fact, that I've come to learn and talking to others.

And this is the classic, you know, I have a friend who, but really others who are in the landscape of looking for a relationship.

And there are people I know well who go through a lot of effort to set an intermittent schedule of response,

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like to not give the other person the sense that they always respond with short latency, because indeed sometimes they will be able to do that and sometimes they won't. What they're basically trying to do is make sure that the person doesn't, they're actually trying to take care of the other person in addition to themselves, because I think we come to expect a certain latency of response with certain individuals. And if we don't hear back with that particular latency of response, our own anxiety starts to pick up and it can be quite damaging to a relationship, particularly to the generative drives within us, because in that time that we're stressed, we're not tending to other things, including things that we could do for the relationship that we're so worried about. The famous scene in *Swingers*, right, where the person leaves a message and then, and lives the whole relationship in his own mind and breaks up with the person, and they never actually spoke, right? There's the anxiety run wild and, of course, I remember that was very, very popular when that came out. Why? Because it resonated, you know, with the insecurities we feel, and now with the ability to feel those insecurities in a much more immediate way, that person didn't text me back, right? There's a lot more of that inside of us, which really points to if you're able to identify that you're anxious, too anxious for comfort, which, again, if one looks inside or even listens maybe to what others have said or reflected, like there's a lot of data, especially introspection, to be able to identify that, right? The next question is always why, right? Let's go look at that. Maybe that person has been anxious their whole life, right? Maybe they just have run tense all the time. You know what? Sometimes a little bit of medicine that kind of just pulls that down. A person can take that for 50 years, life is better, there's no side effects. So sometimes that might be the case, right? Sometimes the person's anxiety kind of grew throughout childhood, and maybe that's because there were difficult things or traumatic things that happened. Maybe there was nothing like that, but maybe the person was very good at engaging in the world and then felt more and more pressures upon themselves, and no one ever did anything wrong, and they've only been rewarded, right? But regardless, look at the anxiety in yourself, go back to those pillars, right? And one might discover, for example, maybe the anxiety I'm feeling is attributable to the other person. Am I feeling anxious because I'm intimidated, right? Am I feeling anxious because I know that if I don't behave in a certain way, you know, the next time there's a group meeting, there'll be some snarky joke made about me. So anxiety, sometimes it's the self. Sometimes it's got a lot of biological components. Sometimes it's got a lot of psychological components. Sometimes both, right?

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Sometimes it's the environment.

Sometimes it's the other, right?

The other person.

So look at why, because that's how we learn, right?

Like, what is going on inside of me?

Where is that level of anxiety?

How does it not feel comfortable?

Like, what actually is it?

How is it changing?

How am I behaving?

How might it be changing?

How am I responding to it?

So what are we doing?

We're going back to this look in those 10 cabinets and figure out why, which we can do, right?

The vast majority of times between ourselves and the use of others, either professionally or non-professionally, we can go understand the anxiety or the lack of anxiety.

Why am I not so motivated, right?

I mean, that's a case with a lot of people who feel demoralized.

They don't feel they can get anywhere in the world, right?

The world's a bad place.

And, you know, and how are you going to make your way in the world?

And they start feeling nihilistic or, you know,

they feel like there's the eight balls against them,

even in a generational capacity, right?

And now they feel demoralized and the tension inside is soothed by things.

So maybe that's the person who's overusing the thing that soothes, right?

So they could go look at, hey, like, I always kind of motivated

and did well in sports or the well in this was interested in that, right?

What's going on?

That's how a person could identify, for example, being demoralized.

So that process of inquiry gives us the information that we can use

in the service of change and the change while not achieved 100% of the time, the change for the better is predictable if it's arising from a place of understanding.

I'm very curious about frames of mind in relationship,

in particular, how being in our own experience, say, anxious

because someone hasn't responded to us and really paying attention to the anxiety

and drilling into it and asking ourselves, you know, why am I anxious

and do I deserve to be anxious?

Is it about me?

Is it about them?

Whether or not that's a valid pursuit

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or whether or not focusing on the other person and trying to imagine, you know, like what's going on in their head that they might be doing this or that they seem to do something repeatedly.

This, of course, relates to much more than just the scenario of waiting for a text message and feeling anxious.

I mean, I think so much of how we come into relationships of all kinds, you know, romantic, certainly, but family relationships are, you know, in and around the tendency to switch back and forth, sometimes seemingly at random between our own experience and what am I feeling?

What am I experiencing?

And then thinking about the other, like what is, what are they thinking?

What are they experiencing?

I mean, this is everything to do with human dynamics, right?

I would think that it's near impossible for the typical person to just live life through their own frame and lens and never pay attention at all to what others might be thinking.

Even, for instance, the most exploitive, extractive, narcissist, sociopath, presumably is thinking about, you know, who in the room is going to be their target because of how that person might be feeling.

And of course, on the benevolent side, people who want to do positive, generative things in the world are probably thinking about, you know, who to align with, who has common goals that they might want to work with or be with romantically that could help them and the other person generate.

So what is this thing that we do?

You know, what is it called

and how does it work to place ourselves in the mind of others

and what roles does it serve

and what goals does it undercut when we do this?

So I think the first thing to say is that everything follows the same simple pattern, right?

So I start with thinking about me, right?

If I'm anxious, why am I anxious?

What's going on inside of me?

I think about you.

Are you anxious too?

Or maybe I'm not anxious, but I notice that you are, right?

So there's the thought about the eye

because I can't think in a clear-headed way about you

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unless I've thought about me, right?
Because if I'm really, really, really anxious,
then how am I supposed to understand
and try and get an idea of where you're at, right?
So then where do we arrive?
We arrive at the magic bridge of the us, right?
That's what connects us, whether the us is a friendship,
it's a professional relationship, it's romance, right?
There's the bridge of the us
because it's not just how or when am I anxious?
How or when are you anxious?
What are things like when we're together, right?
Maybe I'm anxious when we're together
and what's that tension about your anxious when we're together
and maybe that's for reasons we could talk about and make less.
Maybe there's some insecurity in one of us
or maybe the other person is behaving in a certain way
that's not making the second person feel good, right?
We can then come together and see how does the us impact
the level of anxiety
and how do we then take away from the us being stronger?
So think about, we talked about the trauma bond.
Trauma bond can be enacted in a negative way,
it can be enacted in a positive way
and those two people who can go to the museum together
who can't go to the museum separately, right?
They're living in the magic bridge of the us, right?
They're both at the museum, but neither can go to the museum, right?
Neither can go to the museum, but both can go to the museum
and then they take away stronger selves from that, right?
That's a reinforcing experience, it's positive, right?
It builds the generative drive, it builds confidence, right?
The person went, they were assertive
and that was gratified in a good way and they felt pleasure, right?
So when we look at the us, it is about the us in the moment, right?
But it is also about how two people are impacting one another
in the rest of their lives.
And this, of course, this is more important the closer the relationship.
Like this is very important, for example,
in close friendships or family relationships
and I think this is of extreme importance in relationships, right?
The two people who presumably are the closest to one another on earth.
So a shared us that promotes understanding

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and bolsters a sense of agency and gratitude
and bolsters the generative drive,
like that's great for both people when they're not in the us.
When one goes one way and one goes the other
because that happens all the time in relationships too, right?
Or go to work at different places
or we bolster ourselves outside of relationships
if we see what the magic bridge of the relationship can be.
So we can look there for problems like why am I anxious?
Why are you anxious? Why are we anxious?
Why are you only anxious when we're we and not?
You know, we can look over all that and we should, right?
But we can also even more powerfully look for the good there, right?
How can our shared bond, whatever it may be, be better for both of us
and what stronger incentive could there be
to do that in relationships, right? Romantic relationships.
They're the ones that are closest to us.
If they're not romantic, they could be French.
The closest relationships are they're the most important vehicles,
so to speak, to better health and happiness,
to getting to that place of peace and contentment and delight, right?
The us is very, very powerful.
In fact, even more powerful than the I and the you.
When thinking about the us and trying to understand
why somebody that we know and are in relationship with
is behaving the way they are or might be feeling or claiming
they feel the way that they are,
how useful do you think it is for us to put ourselves in their shoes?
You know, I can think of all sorts of ways in which this could be beneficial.
I can also think of all sorts of ways in which it would be
focusing off the self and our own experience
in ways that might be defensive avoidance or denial, right?
Yeah, I'll come clean.
I mean, there have been plenty of times in a relationship
where I get fixated on why someone is the way they are,
behaved the way they did,
and more often than not, by taking a step back
and thinking about why my reaction to that is the way it is,
I don't solve the quote-unquote problem,
but I get a lot further along in terms of quelling my own anxiety
and finding a path forward.
Right, right, right.
So, mentalization, right,

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which is the ability to discern feeling states,
intention states in self and others,
but now we're looking for others, right?
So the ability to understand feeling states,
what's going on inside of you, intention,
what are your intentions, right?
That should only be good, right?
Because if we're seeing it through a clear lens,
meaning a lens that's not biased by some problem,
like a defense mechanism of rationalization,
for example, or of projection, right?
If we're seeing clearly, we're learning about the other, right?
And the learning is never bad, right?
Knowledge, truth is good.
So if we learn about the other by,
in that sense, putting ourselves in their shoes,
then we gain information, but it's the health in us
that is so crucial to what we do with that information, right?
So one person could say,
put themselves in the other person's shoes,
and they can say, okay, that person I can see,
that person's responding, and they say,
pretty calm, pretty calm about something, right?
And maybe that's just a good thing.
Maybe there's some contention going on,
and that person's maintaining their cool,
and that person's going to be really helpful
in navigating an argument or a disagreement
to some really positive endpoint, right?
So if a person sees clearly, like I see,
okay, I can see that you're calm,
and I also see that you're trying to figure things out
and the things that you're saying are sort of positive.
You're disagreeing with me,
but you don't seem to mean ill, right?
Then I can see, you know what?
I think you're calm is good, right?
Because I'm getting a little bit upset, and you're not.
And I see that there's a benevolence in you,
so maybe you'll guide us to the place that maybe I can't, right?
But think about if there's not a clear lens inside of me, right?
If I have a defense system
that leads me to externalize responsibility,

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that leads me to project or leads me to all sorts of things
that are not healthy, now I might think,
well, you're calm because you just don't care about me, right?
I mean, so think about the same exact thing, right?
Now, in the example we're giving,
the person in your position is like being really benign
and benevolent, but it happens all the time
where that is misconstrued.
So it's not that the insight that person is calm.
I see that they're calm.
It's that there's a deficit in the mentalization.
The person is not fully understanding their intention, right?
What's coming through then gets distorted, right?
So we think about defense mechanisms.
They can be clear, they can let light through
in this beautiful way that has fidelity,
or they can be very distorting.
So the thought, if I'm discerning that you are benevolent
and you seem to be trying to solve the problem for us,
but I take in and you just don't care about me
and you're trying to put one over on me.
If I've assessed it accurately,
but it comes on the other end in a way that's changed, right?
That's because there's a lack of clarity.
There's distortion inside of me, right?
So then if I'm really working on myself,
I'm in the best place I can be,
I'm going to be better at mentalizing about you and me, right?
Even if I say, well, we're having a disagreement.
I know I tend to get a little defensive.
So I'm going to be a little biased to see what's in you
in a kind of negative way, right?
So what am I seeing?
Like, okay, you're pretty calm.
Like, maybe you don't care.
Like, I know I can think that, right?
But like, come on, you're trying.
You want to solve our problem.
Like, imagine when that goes on inside of a person,
which sometimes goes on consciously
or goes on unconsciously or some mixture,
it's so powerful, right?
The person's aware of their own state,

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which helps them to be aware of the state of the others,
of the other.

And then the information they're getting comes through
the reality.

And now all of a sudden instead of maybe,
I'm going to blow things up.

Now I'm aligned with you in solving our problem
because I see clearly about you and me.

And that's going on all the time.

It might say, well, it's complicated.

There's a lot of back and forth, right?

There are millions of things going on
every split second in our unconscious mind
that is throwing all this up to the conscious mind.

It's doing things rapidly.

That's going on all the time in us,
whether we want to acknowledge it or not.

And we choose not to acknowledge it at our own peril
because then we're not going to those two pillars
and they're 10 cupboards.

We're not going to the structure of self,
the function of self,

and what comprises those two pillars to look for,
hey, what's going on, right?

Let me understand better.

And even if things are going well, right?

We can always, as you said, not that long ago,
we can understand ourselves better.

The stronger I am, the more generative drive there is in me,
the less defensiveness,

the more the agency and the gratitude,
the more I'm armed for whatever difficult thing comes my way.

So if there's a conflict with someone,
whether there should be or there shouldn't be,

maybe someone's being really aggressive
and I got to kind of say some things
and try and counter that, right?

I'm going to be able to discern one from another.

I'm going to be more effective in both, right?
I just set myself up for success.

And if I'm setting me up for success,
then I'm also setting you up for success.

If you're someone I have a relationship with,

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no matter what it is.

And then ultimately I'm setting the we, right?

The magical bridge of us.

I'm setting that up for success too.

And that's how you see on these levels of emergence that,

you know, if you understand everything about you

and understand everything about me and let's say,

a person understands we have a generative drive,

you don't really know what our relationship is going to be like,

but you think, I bet it's going to be a good one, right?

And then what would we then contribute, say,

to a broader culture?

So a group of people, maybe there's 10 people,

a bunch of friends getting together.

We would contribute goodness at that next level,

which is then the culture of the larger group.

In hearing your description of mentalization,

this ability for all of us to get into the mind of another

and to try and imagine motivations and states

that would explain their behavior.

And self, right?

And self.

Yeah, that seems like a natural reflex that's healthy.

And it seems to surface most often in,

as the consequence of negative interactions, right?

Something didn't go right.

And so we kind of explore like, was it them?

Was it me?

Like, was it something that happened before?

What else is going on with this person?

As a way to try and arrive at some sort of

hopefully generative understanding.

But it seems to me there's also great value

in mentalizing about others under conditions

in which things are going well,

so that one can potentially make things

or encourage things to go even better

in future interactions.

Well, the first thing I would say is,

I think the reflex is most often not mentalizing.

That the reflex is most often not mentalizing, right?

Because the reflexes often come from a position

of not feeling safe, right?

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There's some conflict.
I don't feel good, right?
There's some conflict.
People, you know, we all can get very defensive very quickly,
whether we show it on the outside
or we start partitioning inside.
And the problems come not from mentalizing,
but they come from not mentalizing, right?
And not being aware of the difference.
Because then I conclude,
I know what's going on in you and I don't, right?
Because I don't know what's going on in me, right?
And I think you're being aggressive, really.
I'm feeling kind of defensive.
I'm feeling vulnerable.
And then I'm getting aggressive, right?
But I can't handle that
because I don't want to be aggressive.
So you're aggressive, right?
So there's such a difference between, say,
coming at a self-other conflict from the perspective of, say,
not mentalizing, but thinking that you are versus mentalizing.
There's a difference between, is it me?
I know it can't be.
Is it you?
It must be, right?
And that's how a lot of that goes.
And then, of course, what's the data that's gathered?
The data that's gathered supports that.
I mean, I think there's wars, I think, have happened,
you know, based upon this little conflicts and friendships
and in relationships.
The key about mentalizing is that's not what it is.
Mentalizing it goes like this.
Is it me?
Is it you?
Is it us?
Let's figure that out.
Let's figure it out together, right?
It's not defensive.
It's not aggressive.
It's not projecting.
It's really actually seeing.

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And look, if it's me, I want to be aware of it and say,
yeah, like, whoa, I got up on the wrong side of the bed.

Like, look, let me just say I'm sorry, right?

Or if I might say, look, I know that you're being aggressive
and you normally wouldn't be there and say,
look, let me just get away from this.

Let the person I care about calm down, come back later.

Or if it's us, there's really something between us
and let's sort it out.

Like the information that allows the healthy, right?

The agency and gratitude decisions is always there
through mentalizing.

The danger is when we're not mentalizing,
but we think we are.

Got it.

In keeping with thinking about others
and what's going on with them,
mentalizing that is.

And in thinking about what's going on with ourselves
and the exploration of the cupboards
under the pillars of structure of self, function of self
and our desire for all of that to geyser up into agency
and gratitude.

One thing that we hear about so much these days
and generally I think it's good that people are talking
about them are boundaries, right?

You know, you've crossed my boundary
or I'm setting a boundary and I've certainly embedded
the message in my head that in order for certain relationships
to be at their most loving in my life,
sometimes the boundaries require very little frequency
of communication.

But that doesn't mean the relationships aren't ongoing.

So what are your thoughts on boundaries
and how should we think about boundaries
for sake of healthy relationships?

Well, healthy boundaries always start inside.

And then once we have them squared away inside,
we can project them outward, right?

The same as everything works, right?

It starts with the self and then it includes the other.

So let's say you took an example of a friend
who's just a little too presumptuous, right?

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Like the kind of person you'd rather knock on your door but who just opens the door and comes in.

Like that kind of thing.

And you like the person a lot and there's a lot of resonance and you want to lose the friendship.

And then so let's imagine what could happen here.

It's not the only thing that can happen but a thought experiment, right?

So the person may then question themselves, like, is there something wrong with me?

Like, because I don't really like this person coming in my front door.

Like, is that just me?

Am I being weird about that?

Or the person can kind of stop and think about that and they can take stock of self.

And they can arrive at an answer, right?

For themselves.

Like, look, that person may conclude that, you know what, people are not as close to as this person come in my front door.

You know what, that's okay, right?

You know what, I don't need to set a boundary there, right?

That's possible, right?

More often what the person concludes is, no, I don't really want that.

Like, I do actually want this person to knock on the door.

And that's okay.

There's not something wrong with me.

It's not that I'm being a jerk.

It's not that I'm being a bad friend, right?

Because what are they saying?

You might say, oh, they're preparing for what the other person could say.

No, they're countering what they're testing out to themselves.

Does that mean I'm a bad friend?

No, right?

That kind of thing.

So they know and then they understand and then they have the right to set the boundary, right?

Like, okay, it's my house.

I try and be generous

but I still don't want people coming in the door.

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So come to some conclusion that setting the boundary is okay and you're squared away with it inside.

Then you communicate the boundary outward, right?

And you say, how do I want to communicate that?

Like saying, hey, man, don't come in the front door anymore.

Like, that's not so good, right?

Now the friendship is really on the rocks, right?

But to say to someone something like, yeah, look,

I care about you and I trust you

and I know you feel the same way about me,

but it just makes me nervous.

You know, when people just come in the door,

like, do you mind?

Like, is it okay?

Like, if you just please not knock on the door.

Now think about how that's been done.

Like it's so accurate, right?

To what's going on inside the person,

to how the person wants to communicate with the other

then you have the highest likelihood of effectiveness, right?

And the person also in that sense

has sort of the clean conscience.

It's so to speak that lets them take in information back.

So let's say the other person

hopefully has a high generative drive

and all the good things we're talking about could say,

oh, you know what, I'm sorry,

I didn't mean to make you feel uncomfortable.

I kind of just automatically do that

or, you know, I always do that at my brother's house

and it's close by or whatever the person is saying.

No worries.

Okay, everything is fine, right?

But let's say that person does get mad, right?

Now you know, like, oh, what's going on in this person, right?

Because now what you're doing

is you're seeing signs of unhealthy in the other person.

And it may be that, whoa,

that's not so healthy with the person,

but I like other aspects of the friendship

and that seems like kind of a strange idiosyncrasy.

Then you might decide, you know what,

I want to keep this friendship so I'll start locking the door.

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And the person has to knock.
Or you might think, okay,
is this, am I seeing something here
that's about lack of consideration, right?
That's about selfishness.
It ultimately may be about envy.
I'm going to walk into your house and ruin your privacy, you know?
And I'm going to walk into your house
and make you feel anxious.
I feel entitled to do that.
Like the kind of thing that's really coming through the lens of envy.
So then you start thinking about that.
And maybe, not always, of course,
sometimes you find a friend who can do the right thing.
Sometimes you find a friend who can't
and you can still make the friendship work.
Sometimes you find a person who's not a friend, right?
And you see, like, oh, that's how everything is with this person.
You know, it's like, there's no us.
There's no us, right?
And that's how people can leave relationships
that ultimately are exploitative in one way or another,
whether it's a friendship, it's a romance.
If a person really understands there's the me, the you,
the magical bridge of us,
and then wait, there's no magical bridge of us.
I feel that there's a magical bridge of us,
but the other person doesn't.
There's immense power of understanding
and then of appropriate self-care and self-protection.
Over and over again,
not just during today's episode,
but in the previous two episodes,
it seems that getting squared away with oneself
or at least one's own internal processes to some degree, right?
Gaining some insight as to where the negative
or even positive emotion within us is arising
when we're in relationship to anyone or anything.
It just seems so key.
It's like the foundation of it.
You know, you said, you know,
like getting to the maximum amount of agency and gratitude
is the goal, really.

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And that's done by cycling back through the cupboards that reside under structure of self and function of self and asking questions about oneself.

And really, unless we are trained psychiatrists like you, none of us really should be doing that for the other person, it seems.

This is really each and all of our own responsibility to do for ourselves,

but that it serves others in so many positive ways.

Right, right.

So, mentalization greases the progress of all things good, right?

Because it is about actual understanding, feeling states, intentions.

But I have to first mentalize about me before I mentalize about you.

A way of putting this would be,

if I'm thinking about you before I'm thinking about me,

I'm on a fool's errand, right?

You have to start with the self

and to try and attain clarity of self

or to realize that you can't, right?

It's a very important nuance.

If I know that, say, there's trauma in me about a certain thing

and I know that I respond in ways

where sometimes my emotions get high

and I can't quite think through it all, right,

which can happen to me with references

or something that's encompassing a certain kind of trauma,

I want to be aware of that, right?

So, this idea of not only being aware

of what you know about yourself,

but being aware that there are things

you don't know about yourself.

So, if I know enough to know that a certain kind of interaction

about a certain kind of trauma really sets me to a place

where I'm not able to mentalize

like I normally would be, right?

I'm sort of flying blind, right?

Then good for me to know that

because I don't know what that's doing to me.

So, it's the last time to make a conclusion.

So, let's say I'm in that state.

Let's say I'm in that state

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because it's something that just happened, right?
And now we have some sort of conflict, right?
Then for me to realize like, well, what's going on in me?
I'm bringing to this a lack of clarity
because I'm really activated, right?
And that's since the anxiety, the tension in me
has been raised to the negative emotion,
that reflexive negative affect feeling emotion
has been raised in me.
And then I realized like,
I don't know how it's going to go
if we interact about it now
because I can't rely on me.
So, like, hey, can we talk about this later?
The same way if you recognize in the other
that person who's usually rational,
all worked up, recognize that in the other, right?
And maybe that person doesn't realize that
they still want to interact.
And you say, can we, let's revisit this.
We're like, we're both kind of calm, cool and collected, right?
So, mentalization increases the wheels of all progress,
but like anything else has to be deployed
in a way that works.
And the way that works is I start with me,
then I go to you, and then I go to us.
I'm fully on board to start with me,
then to the other, and then to us model.
It makes total sense.
In fact, so much so that I'm starting to build
an image in my mind where first is a kind of a rule,
which is, you know, it starts with self understanding
and, you know, thoughtful, structured inquiry
along the lines of the map that was laid out
in episodes one and two of this series
and that we've been alluding to numerous times today.
And then there's a second line or rule
that I've got written on this imaginary piece of paper
in my mind where anytime I default to thinking about another
without first going to my own map
and exploring what's going on with me,
that my own map starts to become blurry
like I'm losing access to it and it potentially could disappear.

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I'm just creating this in my own mind as a way to create a little bit of, I think, healthy anxiety.

I like it.

To really go there first.

Paints the picture, yes.

And, you know, the purpose in having such a, you know, an image in my mind that, you know, access to the self and understanding of self is potentially drifting away is because I think for me there's a third line in this rule set that I'm imagining, which is that the less understanding we have of our own map and internal process, the more likely I am, or we all are, to just latch on to an unhealthy map, another unhealthy map.

I have to believe this.

Or even follow the directions of our own unhealthy map, right?

Which leads us to someone else's unhealthy map and then we latch on to it like you said.

Yeah, absolutely, yes.

Yeah, that's right, because it's still active even if it's blurry or if it's obscured from my awareness and drifting away.

If I'm trying to guide myself with my broken compass, I run into someone else with a broken compass.

Now we're both wandering, right?

So be aware if the compass isn't working the way we want it to, can we go look at that?

Can we make the map healthy, make the map accurate, make the map guide us towards what we want because then we will find other people who've worked on their own maps that way.

Absolutely, and so often I hear about, and frankly I've experienced this feeling like, oh, it's just a matter of finding somebody who is healthy, right? And then things will be much easier and much better.

And surely that has to be the case.

And surely there have to be instances where people have an interaction with somebody that leads to a relationship with somebody and the other person is much healthier.

And whatever trauma we come to the relationship with

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is best supported or better supported
than it would be if we were with somebody exploitive
or who is truly damaged in some way
who basically had a map that was really,
I don't wanna say screwed up,
but that they had not explored and worked.
They need a lot of work.
But I don't see that very often.
I definitely see people who at least from my outside read
seem to have healthy maps
or are doing regular exploration of their maps
and therefore healthy.
Who knows?
I don't know what they do with their time
in every domain of life.
But once again, we come back to this importance
of understanding what's in those cupboards,
what's in those pillars as a,
not just important, but critical step
in understanding and building ourselves in positive ways.
And as I said once or twice before in this series,
but I'm gonna say it again
and I'm sure again and again before we conclude this series
is that what's so attractive about this map
is that it sets a very clear and simple set of ideals.
Not necessarily simple to attain.
And as you said, it takes time,
but agency and gratitude, empowerment, humility,
leading up to peace, contentment and delight,
as action states, not as passive states
to just bask in and disappear.
And this notion of the generative drive.
And by now in this episode,
I'm sure people are well on board the understanding
that the generative drive is not just about
going out and doing things.
It's about doing things in service to
and in a way that supports learning, knowing, creating,
not just of others and in the world, but inside.
Yes, yes.
I love the map imagery
because you can almost see the map changing.
As a person, I imagine a person is busy in the way in the cupboards.

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There's a lot to work on in this cupboard
and they're busy in the way and they're doing the work
and we can see the map changing.
That path that looked like a really good path
actually goes through a swamp.
You can see the swamp on the map now.
It appears on the map.
That other path that looked like it's a little circuitous,
that's a good path.
It might be a harder path.
It is a little circuitous, but look where it leads.
The map becomes clear as we do the work on ourselves.
Yes, and also the understanding that you've laid out for us here
really helps avoid a lot of the common pitfalls
that are associated with sticky language
and sticky for good reason.
I mean, what's stickier and more interesting
for people that are interested in themselves
in relationship than things like boundaries
or labels like anxious attach or secure attach.
I'm not being disparaging of those labels,
but I'm realizing those are just labels.
They don't define action items
and specific lines of inquiry to get us
back into our self-understanding over and over.
Not as a full-time job.
We all have to live our lives,
but as a way actually to be more leaned into life
in the outside world.
Those labels define people no better
than the numerical diagnoses
in the psychiatric taxonomy book that we glorify.
Labels are not understanding.
Numbers are not understanding.
They can help.
Taxonomies are good.
Sometimes labels let us categorize things,
but labels are not a substitute for understanding.
Numbers are not a substitute for understanding.
If we look at ourselves, we get real understanding.
And that's what makes the difference.
That's what bolsters agency,
gratitude, all those good things,

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clear mentalization,
greasing the wheels of progress more,
regenerative drive getting stronger.
We really can find goodness and often do.
And that's why I think everything we're talking about
is very hopeful.
I mean, it acknowledges there's complexity,
there are pitfalls, right?
There are all sorts of things to it
that we need to be aware of and to be aware of,
but that doesn't mean that ultimately it isn't positive,
that we're not speaking to,
hey, whatever it is that's ailing you,
that thing can be better.
I'm so grateful that you're sharing your knowledge
and experience around all of this with us.
And that you've laid out such a clear and logical
and deep and tractable,
really actionable understanding of all this
that we can engage in.
It's tremendously powerful.
Thank you.
I so appreciate it.
Thank you.
Thank you for joining me for today's discussion
about how to improve your relationships
with Dr. Paul Conti.
I'd also like to take a moment to remind you
that the fourth episode in this series on mental health
with Paul Conti will be out next week.
And that links to all the episodes can be found
at hubermanlab.com.
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or guests that you'd like me to consider hosting on the Huberman Lab podcast, please put those in the comment section on YouTube. I do read all the comments. And if you're not already following me on social media, I am Huberman Lab on all platforms. So that's Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Threads and Facebook. And on all those platforms, I discuss science and science-related tools, some of which overlap with the content of the Huberman Lab podcast, but much of which is distinct from the content of the Huberman Lab podcast. So again, it's Huberman Lab on all social media channels. Not on today's episode, but on many previous episodes of the Huberman Lab podcast, we discussed supplements. While supplements aren't necessary for everybody, many people derive tremendous benefit from them for things like enhancing sleep, for hormone support, and for focus. If you'd like to see the supplements discussed on the Huberman Lab podcast, you can go to livemomentus spelled O-U-S. So it's livemomentus.com slash Huberman. If you haven't already subscribed to our newsletter, it is a zero-cost newsletter called the Neural Network newsletter. And in the Neural Network newsletter, you get free podcast summaries as well as toolkits. The toolkits are brief PDFs that list off the specific science-backed protocols for things like improving your sleep, improving focus, optimizing dopamine, deliberate cold exposure. We have a complete summary of our fitness series. Again, all available, completely zero-cost. You simply go to hubermanlab.com, go to the menu, scroll down to newsletter, and provide your email to sign up. We do not share your email with anybody. Thank you once again for joining me

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for today's discussion with Dr. Paul Conti.
And last but certainly not least,
thank you for your interest in science.