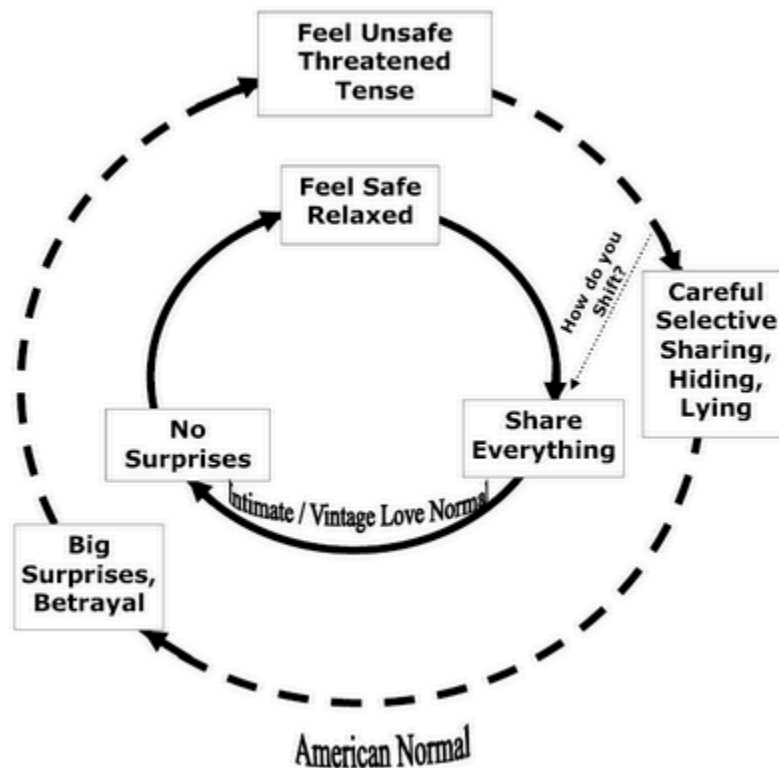


No Surprises / Big Surprises

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People still ask me, "How much should I tell my partner?" I wrote a [paper on this topic some years ago](#) and you can read that to get my general thoughts. However, I want to share a new and simple idea. This paper and chart have had quite an impact on people. In some cases, it has been "life changing" after one reading. That has surprised and pleased me. It has also upset a bunch of readers. Look at the following picture.



If you want to be relaxed, you could choose to live alone. But if you want to be relaxed AND live with someone, then you must choose the inner of the two circles. To feel safe, to have low blood pressure, to be free of tension (at least from your partner) all you need is to create a relationship of few or no surprises. To be a source of safety to your partner you must gently share new stuff. No surprises mean safety.

However, the only way to get "no surprises" is if you share everything. If I know what my partner is thinking, if I know how she operates, what her values are, what her likes and dislikes are, then what she does will not surprise me and I can relax. I may not "like" or "prefer" what she does, but it will not surprise me and I can be at ease with her. Thus, if you want to feel safe with a person, you need to develop the mutual habits of sharing everything easily, comfortably, and readily. Simple.

Now, look at the outer circle. Most people in our culture do not feel safe to share their inner workings, and thus they are careful about what they say. They selectively share. I think a foolish example of this is to "share only nice things and keep awkward or negative things hidden." Sometimes this is called "being polite."

While this may work with people at work, selective sharing in a long-term relationship is a problem. The "secrets will surface." Thus, there will be Big Surprises, and with those surprises, there will often be a sense of betrayal.

But Big Surprises will scare people and to a state of unsafety, apprehension, and tension. This is nowhere more clear than in a marriage when an affair becomes public. At that moment, the burden of the unknown and unshared material becomes enormous. People, particularly the "affaired-against-partner" start asking many questions. They have become fearful of all that unknown stuff. The questions go on and on. I see this as an invitation to shift from the outer circle to the inner circle.

A friend wrote me this week with this problem.

I will ask my husband if he will do something. Let us say pick up a pound of fresh ground coffee from the coffee house he goes to every day. He says "sure." He comes home without the coffee. I say "No problem. Will you get it the next time?" He says "sure." So, this scenario repeats itself...and still, no coffee. We are now completely out of coffee.

So, before our separation, I would have just gotten the coffee myself and be done with it. However, because that was the way I handled many many things --I would ask, he would say he would do something, he would never do it, I would "do it myself" and I ended up being resentful after awhile.

I don't want to be a "nag". I don't want to seem like I'm making a big deal out of seemingly inconsequential thing. Yes, I could just get the coffee and be done with it. But, it really is about him saying he will do something and not doing it.....which leads me to question many of the things he says he will or will not do.....how do I know which ones are for real and which are not???

As you can see the most powerful of the issues here is that "something is going on and has been going on" in the husband and the wife does not know what it is. No safety. She is inclined to think this is a small matter (about coffee) but it is, to me, a vast topic about Safety and Trust. At least she is aware of being in that outer circle.

Pot and Alcohol

I thought I would just add a bit of fun to this topic. I have found that the effect of Pot (THC) in the brain is to prevent what I call rumination or the ability to understand oneself. Pot smoking results in people who have an almost impossible time sharing what is going on inside themselves. This they have to live in a world of chemically induced selective sharing -- with Big Surprises. I tell people, who want a good relationship to get as far away from Pot as they can. Safety and trust depend on that sharing of self.

Strangely, I have a different view of alcohol. Of course, addiction of any kind will be a major problem and alcohol addiction will just kill you. However, some alcohol, a little

buzz, can trick you into slipping your control and getting you to be more candid and revealing. A couple of drinks may lead you to sharing a whole bunch more than you planned. If you follow up on this, you may find yourselves becoming more and more candid and more and more intimate. Kind of funny.

The Road Less Traveled

Many years ago, I read this poem and loved it. Robert Frost caught that moment of decision so well. As I moved along toward intimacy with my partner, I was aware often that I was choosing to go down that untrodden road, to learn that yet unknown part of my partner, to discover that hidden part of me and to share it. This decision we make every time our partner says or does something that surprises us even a little. Will we go down that familiar road of imagining what is going on and not talking? Will we share or invite our partner to share? Someone once told me "If you know where you are going, you are going no where. You are commuting. If you don't know where you are going, well then you are really traveling!"

The movement from the outer ring in the figure above to the inner ring is all about choosing the less traveled road. [Mirroring](#), [Validation](#), [PreValidation](#), [Pulling](#), and the [Odd Dialogue](#), can sure help along the way.

The Road Less Travelled
Robert Frost 1915

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth.

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same.

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.