Lean in

Hugs are a universal symbol of affection. We know how a hug conveys warmth and support. Fellows have even recently developed the common bro’ hug, starting with a handshake that pulls into a chest bump and finished with a clap on the back, all done simultaneously.

There is also some scientific evidence that hugs are good for your health by lowering blood pressure and helping with heart function

But when partners start to pull away, your Coupling will suffer.

In psychological language, individuation is a concept suggesting that people should know who they are and what they are about. As a distinct person I should know myself and follow the suggestion of Shakespeare, who said, “to thine own self be true.”

The danger is that we will get out of balance and put to much importance and interest in the independent category. We might get our own needs met which is good, but forget to include our partner.

Addictions can be the result of unhealthy Coupling. If we are not getting our needs met in a healthy way, we may turn outward to mechanically get out needs met. “You’re not making me happy, so I know what will.” This can happen with a variety of substances and behaviors.

Recently a young man came in to my office describing sexual addiction. Essentially he had gotten into some very bad habits that were controlling his life and destroying his marriage. He was able to find Sex Addicts Anonymous and learn about the possibility of sobriety. This meant no more acting out, no more acting on his own. He committed to allowing his wife to take the lead, for her to be responsible for his sex life. He leaned into the marriage.

He discovered almost immediately that his obsessions no longer controlled him. He could relax and live life and stop looking for the next opportunity to act out. By leaning into the marriage he was set free.

When we live egocentrically, we interrupt the love that could flow our way. When we are so focused and even desperate to get our own needs met, we accept a half-truth, a good enough that blocks the best.

Its kind of like cooking, I can prepare my own meal. But something happens along the way. Somehow after cooking it, you’re not as interested. But let a good cook prepare a meal for you. Well, you know, the same food is better.

Marriage is the crucible, the testing ground where find who we truly are, what we truly love, and how to live that out. This is how Coupling compliments the work of individuation. You may be doing great, but don’t underestimate the value of a spouse to both compliment you and keep you in check.

Coupling can most certainly yield frustration and pain. And usually a reasonable response to difficulty is to get away. We lean out to get short term relief. But the solution is lean in, pull up to the table and enjoy the meal prepared for you.