

Why We're Wired to Sabotage Our Relationships



By Dr. Daniela Roher and Dr. Susan E. Schwartz

In any relationship, you are bound to encounter a few bumps in the road. When this happens, you may be tempted to point a finger at your partner, blaming him or her for your relationship woes. But years of study show that, more often than not, your partner isn't the reason you are at a crossroads. You are.

Your very own physiological wiring, biochemical makeup, and past childhood experiences can sabotage a relationship when you least expect it. And until you understand what's going on "under the hood"—what's triggering issues between the two of you—you'll end up repeating the same dysfunctional patterns

over and over again.

There are three ways our minds and bodies work against us in relationships:

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1. Our bodies are wired for cruise control.

Our conscious mind is only capable of processing 40 pieces of information each second, which means that more than 95 *percent* of what goes on in our minds is outside of our awareness. This overflow of information is automatically handled by our body's limbic and hormonal systems. These systems control feelings of love and desire, whether we feel emotionally safe and happy in our relationships, and how bonded (or distant) we feel toward our partner. These systems also control what happens when a relationship heads south. When disagreements and arguments spike, the hormone cortisol spikes, too, creating high levels of stress and increased feelings of hesitation and doubt. Even after the two of you work things out, cortisol sticks around, leaving you to question the stability of your relationship, and where things are headed with your partner.

2. Our left brains meddle with right-brain emotions.

The right hemisphere of our brain plays a central role in relationships: it processes unconscious and nonverbal socio-emotional information, and it allows us to feel empathy for our partner. Two people in love communicate in a right-brain-to-right-brain fashion: by gazing into each other's eyes, holding each other, and by touching—which is all more intuitive and emotional than logical.

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3. We are wired to recreate the past.

Our childhood experiences, including our relationship with our parents and their relationship with each other, create a scaffolding for how we experience love as adults. Adults long to recapture the love they felt (or the love they wished they'd felt) growing up, even if this fantasy doesn't reflect reality. For example, if you were raised by a single parent, and that parent was always preoccupied with work, you might easily spot and be turned off by partners who put their careers first. Finding a person who focuses selflessly on you, giving you the attention and love you've always craved, fills a personal void. However, if you don't become aware of this connection, you might unconsciously be attracted to people or experiences that recreate your past, even if your past was dysfunctional.

Understanding the connection between past and present not only explains who you are attracted to, it provides you with an opportunity to change. It's also a life preserver when your relationship gets rocky, because it will help you to understand what you and your partner are feeling, where these feelings come from, what triggers them, and why.

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