INTIMATE COUPLES

Regression and Lower-Right Supporting Structures

Thomas A. Habib

ABSTRACT The couples relationship can be volatile and chaotic when it fails to regulate regression unique to the intimate dyad. One of the issues that distinguish the intimate relationship from all others is the influx of regression that interjects earlier developmental aspects of self into the present, which then must be processed by the couple. The capacities to express and balance regression are not as strongly needed in non-intimate relationships. Regression involves powerful feelings of sensitivity and vulnerability that are frequently expressed in withdrawal behavior or anger. This angry enactment of perhaps one's earlier unresolved issues predictably elicits a defensive response in a partner. This article explores the central role of regression in intimacy, identifies rigid patterns that fail to meet this essential need, describes a model to assess a couple's ability to process and balance the expression of regression, and underscores the need for integral sensibilities in the practice of couples therapy.

KEY WORDS couples, regression, intimacy, complementarity

Joe entered his home without purging the stress accumulated from the commute and a workday that hadn't gone well. He was insufficiently aware of his depleted emotional resources and unaware of what he might need or how his wife Eileen could help him process the day. When Eileen failed to acknowledge his arrival loudly enough, his annoyance and anger quickly approached critical mass. She asked him what he would like for dinner, and he retaliated with silence. She got up and entered the kitchen and tried to hug him and he pushed her away. This was a pattern they both unwillingly reenacted throughout the years. His developmental history of unresolved wounds rendered him non-communicative and unable to receive anything she might offer. Feeling rejected and now upset, she asked sarcastically, "What's wrong with you?" Her critical tone seemed to align her with everything that went wrong that day. He shouted, "There's nothing wrong with me." Both his words and behavior didn't make sense to her and she began to panic.

Eileen always struggled with not feeling accepted, a fissure carved in her self-concept decades ago by her mother. "What did I do now?" she protested without remorse, and thereby increased his disdain. "Why are you always mad at me?" she went on—an unresolved issue now interjected in the midst of a failed connection. "You could have at least said hello," Joe shouted with the full force of everything that went wrong that day. The shock from his anger caused her to miss the reference to an unheard greeting, the last exit before an all-too-familiar painful exchange. "No matter what I do, it's never enough. You are always unhappy with me," as tears began to spill over on to her reddened checks. Joe mocked her crying, guaranteeing that this encounter was headed for much more than a spat. She stormed out. Joe never got dinner or the support he needed. Neither person understood what happened and their relationship structure proved inadequate to avoid another painful regression. Theirs was an intimate relationship attempting to traverse a road with neither posted signs nor landmarks to guide them. This, combined with scant and undisciplined inner awareness, rendered this couple woefully unprepared to process sensitive feelings in their intimate relationship.

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What went wrong?

- Both partners ended up needing something at the same time.
- Neither were emotionally prepared to either listen or nurture.
- Additional issues were thrown into the mix.
- Frustration from a poor bid for connection increased the damage (Gottman, 2011).
- Specific needs were never stated.

Consider the same interchange in a scenario where the couple is ready to handle a poor bid for connection. In this vignette, Eileen and Joe have established Lower-Right (LR) operating rules designed to regulate regression:

> *Eileen*: Joe, what do you want for dinner?
> *Joe* (angrily): You could have at least said "Hello."
> *Eileen*: I'm sorry…I could have said it louder [avoiding personalizing the moment]. What can I do for you?
> *Joe*: I don't know. I had a bad day. Can you get me a drink?
> *Eileen*: Here you go. What else can I do?
> *Joe*: Nothing. I'm sorry.

What went right?

- Eileen recognized anger as a poorly expressed need.
- She did not personalize Joe's response and react with anger.
- By avoiding reacting, she could push her needs aside and be there emotionally for her partner.
- She stayed focused upon service to Joe.
- Feeling her immediate and persistent support, Joe quickly apologized.
- Joe's poor bid for connection still succeeded and the couple avoided chaos.

Regression and Intimacy

Law enforcement officials have known for years that a domestic disturbance is a dangerous situation (Garner, & Clemmer, 1986). This potential volatility is an ever-present potential in an intimate relationship due to the depth of feeling that emerges. Bloch and colleagues (2014) comment on the powerful feelings associated with intimacy and a failure to regulate as a "…fall into a primitive, survival-oriented mode of interaction." It suggests the central and unique role of regression and the all important failure to regulate. Regression in its benevolent form can be seen, for example, as baby talk or pet names between two lovers who trust and feel safe with each other. Benign regression is essentially healthy human relating, since everything we do or say is influenced by implicit learning and states learned in our past and instantiated in the present. Qualities that make regression benign include articulation of a specific need, avoiding overreliance upon anger, and expressing the feeling associated with the need. For example, "I worried when you didn't call and I had these horrible fantasies of losing you" is much easier to correctly interpret than angrily yelling, "You only care about yourself!" Many but not all feelings of vulnerability are signs of regression to earlier developmental roles.

In the course of daily interchange, one's partner may either lovingly respond to expressions of vulnerability, or unfortunately, misinterpret or neglect them with predictable outcomes. When the latter occurs,

feelings of abandonment expressed as rage are frequently observed. Not surprisingly, one's proclivity to feel abandonment, and the subsequent expression of rage, is on a continuum. If the family of origin included a father, for example, who was emotionally absent or abusive, then a rage transference to the father figure in uniform is all the more likely. In this example, it is this highly regressed, rage-filled grown man, crazy with pain, who is indeed potentially dangerous.

Fortunately, the vast majority of people are not wounded in childhood to the point where they are a danger to themselves or others. Regression for people with a stable background is not as likely to be explosive in that they learned how to emotionally regulate themselves (Cummings & Davies, 1996). However, we have long known that attachment patterns and capacities differ and are correlated with developmental history (Bowlby, 1962/1982). Regression is a fundamental dynamic in the intimate dyad. Although it is at least implicitly addressed in many psychotherapeutic approaches, treatment opportunities are missed without clear LR structuring and rehearsal of couple regression. Regression within couple's process does contain some aspects of unresolved development, but it is much more. Regression between couples is a process whereby needs are addressed and intimacy is developed. Growth is achieved when the relationship is capable of handling the influence of regression in a way that replaces distortion with reality and chaos with stability. Intimacy is enhanced when vulnerability is risked, sensitivity managed well, and the couple learns the rhythm of fulfilling needs. This article suggests that regression is ubiquitous and inevitable in intimacy and an impactful process for a clinician and couple to focus upon to achieve growth and satisfaction.[1]

The concept of regression has its roots in psychoanalytic theory. Freud coined the phrase regression in service of the ego; however, he went on to assert that regression was also the basis of neurosis and a movement backward to a more infantile state. Regression in service of the ego was explored by Jung, who felt there could be a healthy regression: "…regressive tendencies are not just a relapse into infantilism…but an attempt to get something…reciprocated love, or trust" (Jung, 1993). This was further articulated by Anna Freud (1969), who felt that regression was a normal component of development. Kris (1952), and more recently Knafo (2002), explored the role of regression and creativity in art. Balint (1968) is representative of the clinicians who have noted how regression could be "benign and beneficial" in the therapeutic process once a safe and trusting environment has been built. Similar regression experienced within the transference process can be easily accessed by a clinician treating the intimate relationship.

Attachment theory has long emphasized the positive effects of emotional regulation (Hazan & Shaver, 1984) and is currently applied to couples by Johnson (2004). This article specifies that regression in intimacy also needs to be brought more to the forefront, and regulated and structured during treatment. Furthermore, given how frequently it emerges in daily dyadic encounters, controlled regression is central to successful intimacy. Our culture and segments of the professional community rarely addresses the issue of regression in intimacy. Fruzzett (2006) concluded that regulating reactivity is important in learning to manage emotions. Snyder et al. (2006) state "…emotion regulation involves strategies that individuals use to influence the context, subjective experience, and expression of emotion." Although this article is most certainly in alignment with the need for strategies to regulate reactivity to emotion, it identifies the central role of regression, unlike much of the emotional regulation literature as applied to couples.[2] Consequently, regression universally creates chaos in intimate relationship when it is *not expected, recognized, planned for, nor entered into with established interactional patterns*. An interactional process capable of containing regression is implemented during the relational stage of a couple's development (Fig. 1). This article describes an interactional process and proposes a model couples can use during these highly charged moments. The strength of this model lies within its face validity. Couples can easily learn it, and recognize during periods of tension the complementary roles available to them. This LR structure is essential to regulate and process regression. It minimizes chaos and enables the couple to fulfill an essential function—*responsiveness to regression*. A relationship attuned to regression can ignore content (i.e., making subject object [Kegan, 1998]) and respond to this es-

Individual (O'Fallon, 2010)	**Couples Line of Development** (Habib)
Unitive/Catalyst	Spiritual Nondual Transparency Beloved
Construct Aware/ Strategist	First Love Acceptance Focus on Good Contentment & Grateful
Individualist/Achiever	Relational Flexible Roles Communication Exchange
Expert/Diplomat	Roles Husband/Father Wife/Mother
Opportunist/Impulsive	Safety & Attraction Sensation/Sexual Emotion & Projection Pre/trans fallacy

Figure 1. A proposed line of development for couples and minimal level of individual development for each member.

sential process. This is what Eileen did so well in the second vignette presented above. The interaction was what we will call *complementary*.

Complementary vs. Symmetrical Interaction

A complementary interaction is a reciprocal transaction when members of a dyad assume designated roles. By definition, a complementary interaction completes and makes better an intimate encounter. During a complementary interchange one person is *giving* and the other person is *taking* or receiving.[3] Awareness of these patterns help orient the couple to a need of a member of the intimate dyad and the alternate role their partner must fulfill. It enhances the interaction by containing and potentially satisfying regressive needs. A complementary dyadic process is ideally reciprocal in that both members of the dyad can provide nurturance as well as give clear messages of their dependency needs. This is *flexible complementarity* (not to be confused with a cross transaction in Transactional Analysis). A *rigid complementary* dyadic pattern is defined by the failure of the dyad to sufficiently alternate roles. This LR pattern is due to Lower-Left (LL) cultural messages and the manifestation of Upper-Left (UL) developmental experiences.

The initiation of this essential complementary interaction was poorly begun by Joe in the first vignette, as he clearly needed something other than a fight. Joe's bid for his needs was understandably misinterpreted by Eileen in the first vignette but recognized in the second vignette, where she acted as both a self-disciplined and astute intimate partner. First, she *listened* by affirming that she could have spoken louder regardless of whether or not she had. Second, she *gave him something* by getting him a drink followed by an offer to do

more. These symbolic gestures can be very effective. The situation demanded a demonstration of the vital role she fulfilled for Joe, and her attention to his pain and a conscious choice to ignore his anger avoided the path to an ugly fight that many couples would have taken.

Unbeknownst to Joe but not Eileen, Joe urgently needed a demonstration of this essential nurturing function she served. She knew he was hurting. In effect, she assumed an *adult* role where she momentarily pushed her own needs aside to be there for him. This is not unlike what a parent might do for a child in the throes of sadness, despair, or anger. Or for a friend in obvious pain, or at work for a customer or coworker. In intimacy it is more difficult to restrain one's self when exposed to a partner's anger. Nevertheless, either member of the dyad can provide this much-needed regulation of feeling if it's recognized in the heat of the moment. Bloch et al. (2014), in an exploration of emotional self-control, found the importance of the wife's ability to "downregulate negative expressions" and its' association with marital satisfaction. It is during regression when this ability to down regulate negativity becomes crucial.

Any intimate relationship will occasionally require this demonstration of nurturance and self-control regardless of the stage of development. This is what the intense situation Joe dropped upon Eileen required. Joe's responses were not the best way to get nurturance or the support he legitimately needed, and it seems obvious that seeking nurturance through anger is ill-advised.

Upon entering his home, Joe was out of self-control and internally aware of only anger. There was no self-discipline that comes with conscious familiarity of the depleted emotional experience that he was experiencing. He was unaware of what he needed to help his despair and frustration. What made the quality of Joe's "request for nurturance" poor was that he did not know what he needed. He was consumed by anger and frustration, and perhaps previous unresolved feelings concerning Eileen's capacity for responsiveness. He did not answer the question, "What do I need?" It wasn't until he responded to Eileen's question ("What can I do for you?"), backed by her focus and strength, that he opened to her nurturance. He asked for something to drink, which she dutifully fulfilled. In doing so, she deftly reaffirmed this essential role at a critical moment. The lesson in regression is: when we are angry or hurting, we need to answer the question "What do I need" before initiating an encounter with a partner. This avoids a "hot start" (Gottman, 2011). Joe certainly didn't need a fight with Eileen and the subsequent cathartic release of anger, although there is a known inherent (albeit very dysfunctional) reassurance that one matters when we wound a partner.

The expression of anger is apt to elicit the dysfunctional response present in the first vignette. This is an all-too-common interactional pattern that strains dyadic resources. This is the inherent problem in correctly interpreting a partner's anger that may not reveal the urgency of one's need, nor the vulnerability associated with despair. For better or worse, anger or disappointment is often the path of intimate regression. This pattern is especially prevalent at the roles and relational stages (Habib, 2014) of a couple's development.

In integral parlance, a more conscious, higher-quality interchange would have included Joe recognizing his need for nurturance (UL), while calming a physiological predisposition to strike out and fight in the face of disappointment, frustration or threat (UR), the adoption of a cultural motif of masculine dependency (LL) and a previously constructed dyadic pattern to initiate a complementary interaction where he was in the role to receive from his spouse (LR). This article addresses this LR pattern with awareness of how all four quadrants influence a couple's developmental level. As children we seem to know how to show need, without subterfuge or cloaking it in anger, yet this ability to be transparent in the face of vulnerability is often forgotten in adulthood.

A bit of historical perspective on couples therapy is in order. Couples therapy requires clinicians who are armed with tools and diagnostic formulations that are best selected with AQAL awareness. This need can be seen from the early days when proto-integral sensitivities were emerging among family and couples therapists. The integral sensitivities were seeded in marital and family therapists by the expansion of thought into Systems theory, where concepts were nonlinear and non-reducing (albeit using only the UL and LR quad-

rants). Couples therapy evolved from Family Systems Therapy, which adopted three predominant schools of thought with substantial theoretical and empirical development. These included psychoanalytic theory (Bowen, 1985; Framo, 1982), behaviorism (Jacob & Weiss, 1978), and general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1969). These major schools of thought were adapted to describe and elucidate the family system. Although these schools of thought enjoyed relative conceptual clarity, lending themselves to empirical validation and theoretical development, they also limited the flexibility of couples therapy due to *a priori* assumptions and the limitations they imposed. However, couples therapy was rarely practiced within a theoretical silo, rendering most clinicians bashful eclectics. This discrepancy, between theoretical purity and eclectic practice, is one of the ongoing sources of tension between clinicians and academicians within psychology, as well as other disciplines.

As previously mentioned, all schools of thought within marital and family therapy were heavily influenced by LR system awareness. For example, the psychoanalytic practitioners combined their UL familiarity of the unconscious or shadow influences with known LR system processes. The behavioral practitioner combined their UR behavioral observations with LR patterns. Satir (1983), widely respected among clinicians, more fully anticipated the need for an expanded array from which to draw diagnostic and interventional techniques. Ironically, in an important paper during this era, comparing the above theoretical perspectives, Gurman (1979) rejected inclusion of Satir's work because "…it represents an eclectic mélange of communication principles [UR], Gestalt therapy [UL], Bioenergetics [UR], Object Relations theory [UL], Rational-Emotive and Behavioral therapy [UR], and Client-Centered therapy [UL]," in addition to general systems theory (LR). In retrospect, practitioners responding to the varied needs of couples appreciated the tools afforded by Satir's proto-integral teachings, while theoreticians struggled with conceptual confusion sans an AQAL map. In fairness to Gurman, he cited an early integrative statement of Jackson (1967, cf Gurman, 1979), "…we cannot view diverse theories in an either-or fashion, but must live with the idea that many discontinuous approaches should be investigated and given credence." Furthermore, Gurman (1979) stated at the end of his paper, "The dominant marital therapies three decades from now…may well be the offspring of … miscegenation." By tolerating the interbreeding between systems theory and other major schools of thought, one can sense in these writings the evolution and emergence of integral sensitivities. A more comprehensive model was required to respond to the complexity of couples therapy, which Wilber (2006) foresaw as the broad impact Integral Theory would eventually have upon psychology. This eclectic style of clinical practice seems to have come from a need-driven awareness of the quadrants. All of this was supported by postmodern radials (Tielhard de Chardin, 1955) ushering in the freedom and license to create constructs that better serve the needs of clinicians and clients.

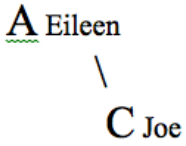
Lower-Right Diagnostic Nomenclature

The following are couple diagnostic patterns that have regression central to their formulation. I will begin with a description of the terms, utilizing the vignettes for illustration. It is an analysis of a couple's transaction which shares similarities with transactional analysis (TA) developed by Berne (1964), Harris (1969), and perhaps best represented today by Stewart and Joines (2012). The analysis of transactions is not unique to TA but rather a conceptual lens widely utilized throughout Family and Couples System Theory.

The proposed model is more tightly focused upon a segment of the couple's relationship, specifically, the effects of regression upon intimacy. However, it also utilizes the terms *adult* and *child*, as does TA. The definition of adult and child roles in this model is more limited than in the TA model. It speaks specifically to the roles of giver and receiver during an interaction. It denotes which partner is expressing a need or feeling (child), while the other partner is responding in a complementary manner (adult). The strong face validity and easy acquisition for couples contained within the terms Adult and Child overcame a reluctance to appropriate terms already utilized by TA. A more extensive discussion of the differences and similarities between TA and

the proposed couple model can be found in the endnotes.[4]

A complementary interaction was seen in the second vignette when Eileen was giving while Joe was the recipient of her nurturance and attention. It can be diagrammed as follows:



"A" stands for adult and "C" for child. In this diagnostic couple model, the person at A is giving, the person at C is receiving. This is what makes it a complementary interaction.

Defining the adult in this model is easier than defining the child role. The adult role is simply giving, most often by being emotionally present for ones's partner. However, to be successful, the role is limited to two responses. The first and most frequent response is to understand and reflect back what one's partner is experiencing, regardless of whether there is agreement. Reflective listening demonstrates understanding of the partner's point of view despite disagreement. Reflective listening, originating from the client-centered therapy of Carl Rogers (1965), has been prescribed as a communication tool throughout the years (Lane, 2005). It is a worthy staple in structured communications training (Hawkins et al., 2008; Owens et al., 2013), although it has been characterized as awkward for couples to utilize (Gottman, 2000).

The second prescribed option at A involves agreeing to do or provide something requested by the partner (e.g., calling when late, checking in prior to making plans, or helping with a task). Anything else attempted while in the A role, such as clarifying content or disagreeing, is prematurely moving into C in the proposed model.

The role at A also requires familiarity with the regressive features of intimacy before actually entering into it. This expectation includes the anticipation that a partner will sporadically initiate C in a way that may rely upon the expression of anger or criticism. Thus, a strong A involves an *a priori* commitment to avoid a simultaneous regression into C, even when the partner displays a poor quality of C. It also requires a resiliency in effort and focus during highly charged reparative moments. The partner at A must maintain their role regardless of being attacked or belittled. This is made clear in that only one person at a time can be at C, and sustaining the A position in a highly charged interaction is practiced. Eileen immediately enters into the A role, as demonstrated by her service mode of getting Joe a drink. This demonstration of her commitment was very effective.

The C role is simply stating and receiving, but it is even more difficult to master than A. It is defined by the unique form of dependency one brings to the intimate dyad. The person at C receives attention, understanding, or other acts of service. It may include, for example, the need for someone to listen, to provide affirmation, nurturance, intimacy, touch, expressions of love, and more. The role at C is further refined by overtly cueing our partner that we have a need in a mode that can be successfully interpreted. For example, relying upon anger-laden verbiage is much more difficult to interpret than a soft and justifiable "when you make plans that don't include me, I fear I no longer matter to you." This is of course dependent upon knowing what we want in these moments and both the awareness and control of the regressive emotions often present. Quality C interaction takes discipline and courage.

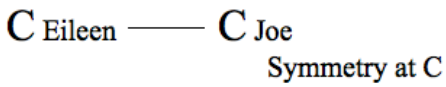
The quality of C is of course on a continuum. It suffers when a member of the dyad is in denial of their dependency or unfamiliar with their vulnerability. It entails the discipline not to attempt communication when anger is the predominant feeling. This restraint is rarely practiced. Many couples process feelings as they arise, without assessing their readiness to engage in constructive dialogue, and thus compromise the quality of C that is shown. High-quality C means asking for one thing, declared only with the feeling it involves. This

means minimizing anger and other negative feelings. In emotionally focused couples therapy, Goldman and Greenberg (2009) implicitly understand the potentially destructive nature of anger by focusing upon helping " …couples to reveal their primary core, softer, vulnerable emotions underlying their harder, …or defensive emotions." This focus promotes the development of high quality C. It is the quality of C that either provokes the highly desired complementary response in a partner or the unsatisfying, disruptive, symmetrical response filled with negativity defined below.

Problems in identification of feelings, as mentioned by Greenberg, can result in poor quality C. Hypothetically, if the issue is a partner failed to call when late, then a sarcastic or guilt-laden bid for notification of tardiness is poor-quality C. Sarcasm is a variation of anger. A feeling more easily interpreted previously suggested could be, for example, fear of an accident, or worry that one's partner no longer cares enough to communicate. This is why anger is difficult to correctly interpret. Furthermore, poorly modulated anger is not a good starting point for interaction. Again, this is Gottman's (2013) "hot start" that Joe exhibited. Joe was likely feeling frustration and exhaustion. During a more controlled start he might have asked Eileen to realize he was spent at that moment. Given a chance, she could have become the partner who took his side and commiserated about the details of what went wrong that day. He might have asked for nurturance, perhaps by asking for attention, by getting dinner, watching TV, or suggesting some other joint activity. All of this was possible, while disclosing his feelings of defeat, disappointment, or perhaps disillusionment. This would have been much easier for Eileen to recognize. Their interaction would have had a much greater chance of becoming complementary during this highly charged time rather than the symmetry seen in the first vignette.

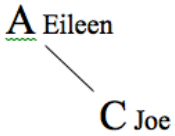
Symmetry at C is defined by both members of a dyad needing something at the same time. This is a painful and destructive sequence because neither person assumes a position of nurturance during highly charged moments. It is distinguished from symmetry at A, a necessary and stabilizing pattern when two adults avoid regression during times of stress or other difficulties. Symmetry at A is only problematic when the pattern becomes rigid and subsequently renders the relationship devoid of intimacy and passion. Rigid Symmetry at A is rare, but can be seen when both members are highly conflict avoidant.

In the first vignette Eileen drops to C and created symmetry at C. Eileen misinterprets Joe's anger as evidence of his disapproval of her, awakening unintegrated shadow from her mother's disapproval of her. The emergence of these feelings at this time compromises her ability to respond to Joe, who occupied the C role first. Thus, Eileen ended up in a C role at the same time as Joe. This undesirable, often chaotic interaction is symmetry at C, and can be visualized in the following manner:



Couples who repeatedly enter symmetry at C frequently experience new wounding and eventually feel hopeless about their relationship. In the first vignette Joe mocked Eileen. One can see how this moment of contempt could become inhibitory for Eileen and stifle future efforts to get nurturance. Now mocked, a vital intimate interaction was unintentionally inhibited, often emerging later in hesitant or distorted form. An example of a distorted expression of closeness arises for couples who rely solely upon fighting as a form of intimacy: Fighting is intimate, although immensely unsatisfying and rarely productive.

In the first vignette Joe's bid for nurturance deteriorated into painful fighting. The couple went from



to

C Eileen —— C Joe

in part because Joe's hot start was undecipherable to Eileen and she went into C with him.

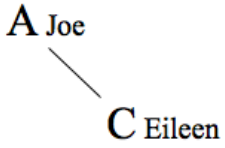
Anger usually expressed as criticism has a way of drawing the partner into a position where they cannot deliver support and nurturance. This never will have a positive outcome. In the first vignette Eileen did not employ the couple's rule: Whoever is at C first gets to keep it until they are done. Simultaneously moving into C creates the lower portion of the diagram, symmetry at C. But there are other reasons couples end up in this unfruitful interchange.

Couple Diagnostics

Interpersonal dynamics are transmitted across generations and are dependent upon the quality and nature of parenting (Serbin & Karp, 2003). Problems in forming new attachment relationships may arise from learned self-protection and other patterns witnessed in the family of origin (West & Keller, 1991). This is relevant to complementarity and symmetry and may get expressed in a strong preference for a care taking role (rigid A) or conversely, to assume an excessively dependent position (rigid C). A model that can take into account these developmental experiences and the effects they have upon couple functioning is useful.

By focusing on the LR patterns of interchange that are unique to couples, the quality of regression for the intimate couple can be improved. The patterns that warrant diagnosis and intervention are those of *imbalance* between A and C. Promoting this LR structural awareness in couples is key to enhancing the regression and intimacy. In effect, it is building an eighth-zone perspective to help regulate the seventh zone of experience.

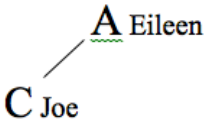
To further develop couple diagnostics and the usefulness of this schema, consider the following. What if the pattern was unbalanced and tended to remain in one direction? For example, what would we conclude about a relationship formed by two lovers, such as Joe and Eileen, that was not flexible and attempted to do too much or exclusively remained in this pattern?



We call it *rigid complementary/traditional*. Rigid, because it spends too much time in this pattern, without partners exchanging A and C roles. Rigidity is not desirable because both partners need to receive nurturance at C, as well as feeling the significance by giving at the A role. Being complementary is good for meeting needs, but *flexible complementary* relationships ensure both partner's needs can be met. It is called "traditional" because of LL cultural messages that generally, but certainly not universally, continue to persist and predispose men and women to develop strengths at A and C, respectively.[5] In the second vignette Eileen superbly moved beyond cultural descriptions and moved adeptly to A. Nevertheless, many couples tend to favor a traditional pattern, and when it reaches a rigid level it fails to meet the underlying needs of both members in the dyad. A rigid preference for this pattern is often a determining factor in initial attraction when the relationship was newly formed. It tends to be based upon comfort with traditional role assignments, perhaps arising from modeled developmental patterns of parents or unexplored aspects of shadow. Due to the inflexibility of the traditional pattern, in time it is likely Joe will complain of Eileen's inadequacy (too much C) and she will complain of his condescending style (too much A). Goldman and Greenberg (2009) note this rigidity in couples, and its consequences, but never fully identify this pattern. "Conflict then results from escalating

interactions that rigidify into negative interactional cycles." Hazan and Shaver (1994) suggest a reciprocal nature of nurturance in intimate relationships, particularly during times of distress, yet they omit the central role of regression.

Below is the second most frequent pattern of unbalanced regression. What would we conclude about a relationship formed by two lovers that was not flexible and attempted to do too much or exclusively remained in this pattern of regression?



It is called *rigid complementary/nontraditional*. Similar to the traditional configuration, this configuration is rigid because too much time is spent in this pattern versus a relationship that is flexible. It is not desirable because both people need the nurturance of being at C, as well as feeling the significance of providing at the A level. Again, complementarity is good, but couples function best in *flexible complementary* relationships. It is called *nontraditional* because the main cultural messages do not socialize men to express feeling and dependency at a rate greater than women, although this is exactly what is happening in this pattern. Other cultural and developmental factors are of greater influence. For example, this pattern could involve a professional woman who has struggled for power and position and avoids dependency, yet marries someone who is capable of dependency. Or this pattern could be seen in a woman who was not allowed sufficient time during childhood to be dependent, perhaps if she was parentified, and consequently, is vicariously attracted to a man who perhaps was over indulged in his developmental journey. In time it is likely that this woman will complain of his inadequacy (too much C), and he of her criticism (too much A).

A few more words on *rigid* complementary patterns, either traditional or nontraditional, and how power (as defined in the next section) plays into these patterns. It would be inaccurate to conceptualize the person at C as always *taking* and the person at A as always selflessly *giving*. No one benefits from a rigid or symmetrical pattern. When rigid, these patterns are dysfunctional and adversely affect the quality of what is received at C, and likewise, delivered from A. Each person participating in these patterns does so for unconscious defensive reasons that influence with whom and how they form intimacy. It is an unconscious contract. The fact that they are not reciprocal and flexible reflects what each person is defending against and holds as shadow. In the traditional direction it appears that he is saying to her, all unconsciously, "I won't make you be strong and independent if you don't make me feel weak and impotent." In the nontraditional direction she is frequently uncomfortable with her dependency and is attracted to the opportunity to mother a man who has not finished differentiating from his parents. It appears she is saying, "I won't make you grow up if you don't make me feel vulnerable." All of these are couples in what Willi (1977) characterized as an unconscious collusion.

Due to the rigidity of this configuration, both people end up with less. Unlike the flexible complementary relationship, there is no empathic awareness. The partner at rigid A does not know how transparency at C feels. Absent this experience of need and vulnerability, it cannot inform the quality of their A. The A/C roles are rarely reversed in rigid patterns. Furthermore, if needs are not fully felt, receiving is not fully satisfying. A useful analogy involves your favorite food: whatever it is, it surely will taste bland if you stuffed yourself with pizza minutes before. Finally, people with skills only at C seem to find people with a complementary preference for A. Strengths only at C are no less inadequate or pejorative than having strengths only at A. Adult and child are not judgments, only descriptions of roles taken in intimate relationships.

Rigid complementary traditional, or nontraditional, are both prone to symmetrical exchanges at C because they do not allow for the dependency needs of one of the partners to be fully realized nor the feelings of significance from A that come from providing for the C needs of an intimate partner. It is occasionally

desirable for a couple to be in a C–C interchange for example during playfulness, humor, or shared moments of grieving.

Successful interchanges at C are more frequent at First Love and Spiritual Stage for couples (Fig. 1); Joe and Eileen were still in the Roles Stage, struggling to master these dynamics addressed during the Relational Stage. In the first vignette, Joe and Eileen were in a hurtful symmetrical interaction that can be diagrammed as follows:

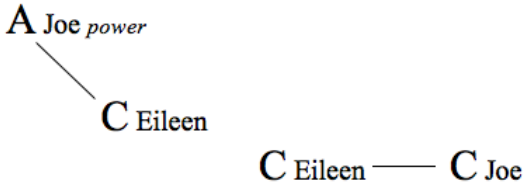
C Joe —— C Eileen

Power

There is one more variable used to fully describe interactional patterns essential to couples. This is *power*. Power is defined as *the ability to influence*. This concept and definition is drawn from the work of family systems theorist Jay Haley (1976). In a family, a child can hold power with excessive behaviors (very undesirable) in the form of temper tantrums, for example, or displays of fragility (shyness, phobias), as well as more aggressive behaviors. In all of these extreme behaviors, the child's influence can be seen in the attention they receive from the parents. When this occurs, parental hierarchy is compromised and their power minimalized. An infant's whimpering can be inadvertently shaped into power if the parents overreact, for example with unnecessary anxiety and attention. Nevertheless, the person with power sets both the tone and establishes what gets attention inside of a family. It is most preferable when it is the parents, as this results in a more functional family process.

In the intimate couple, unlike families, power is best equally distributed. It is correlated with marital satisfaction and is a factor in what gets focused upon in the relationship (Ball et al., 2004). Couples today want partnerships: one only needs to look back to recent history when a man's role was defined as head of the household, heavily influenced by theological traditions and social practices. Relationship structure, power, and role assignment were based upon gender. However, there are significant advantages of power equally distributed in a partnership. Primarily, either person can take charge and set the agenda for agreed-upon goals. An equal partnership also allows the emergence of each person's strengths to benefit the couple and family, which facilitates individual and couple growth. Power exercised at A is very desirable, *providing the relationship is flexible and not rigid*. Power can establish a holding environment (Winnicott, 1965) for the partner at C, as illustrated by Eileen's actions in vignette two. It can make it easier to reveal vulnerabilities and to lean into the supporting strength during moments of transparency. Conversely, power at C is frequently chaotic and disruptive at the Safety & Attraction or Roles stage of development, whereas power at C in the stages of First Love or Spiritual can spur poignant, positively impactful moments.[6]

At the Safety & Attraction or Roles stages, power at C is often expressed as anger or in an emotionally derogatory or manipulative style. Consequently, this relationship is often chaotic, volatile and potentially explosive. When power is at C the partner at A does not have enough influence to contain emotional expressions and help process them into focused appeals that can be accommodated. These interchanges do significant damage and frequently end in exhaustion for both people. In the first vignette Joe was at C with power as he entered the home and the outcome was unsatisfactory for both. As previously noted, Joe and Eileen both ended up at symmetry at C. Joe and Eileen's full diagnostics (*before* he enters the home) in the first vignette can be diagrammed as follows:



This diagnostic description provides a plethora of information concerning the LR interaction deficiencies that will contaminate most of this couple's experiences. The full diagnostics reveal that Joe does not allow himself to go to C until events accumulate to a level of depletion where he's in crisis for all intents and purpose. Without this familiarity with his own dependency, he is overly reliant upon anger to communicate a multitude of legitimate feelings and needs, of which he is only vaguely aware. Upon entering his home at C in the first vignette, which was not this couple's dominant interactional pattern, Joe initiates his need for support with anger. This drags Eileen into C with him, also unaware of her own unresolved developmental UL influences surfacing at this moment. This yields painful symmetry at C for both Eileen and Joe. A summary of A–C model diagnostics can be seen in Table 1.

The Rules of A/C Interaction

This is a summary of the rules of successful A/C interaction drawn from my clinical experience. Some of them are widely held by many couple theorists and researchers and applied to this model.

- Who ever gets C first keeps it until they are done.
- When at A, you can
  - Reflectively listen
  - Agree to give or do something

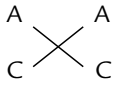
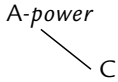
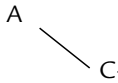
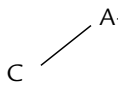
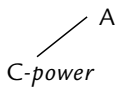
Couple Diagnostic Summary	**Diagram** Man Woman	**Description**
Flexible complementary		Members alternate between giving and receiving Expression of need and vulnerability balanced Equal ability to influence the relationship Most adaptive
Rigid complementary traditional, power @ A		Little/no reciprocity between giving and receiving Need and vulnerability expressed primarily by woman Power/influence greater in man
Rigid complementary traditional, power @ C		Little/no reciprocity between giving and receiving Need expressed primarily by woman Power/influence greater in woman Characterized by chaos with power at C
Rigid complementary non-traditional, power @ A		Little/no reciprocity between giving and receiving Need and vulnerability expressed primarily by man Power/influence greater in woman
Rigid complementary non-traditional, power @ C		Little/no reciprocity between giving and receiving Need expressed primarily by man Power/influence greater in man Characterized by chaos with power at C
Symmetry @ C		Both members expressing need and vulnerability Chaotic interchanges without reciprocity Occasionally playful @ Roles and Relational stages Sensitive exchanges at First Love and Spiritual stages
Symmetry @ A		Both members avoiding regression, need, and vulnerability Conjoint focus upon a task, problem, or duty Stabilizes couple during stress When pattern is rigid (rare), no passion & conflict avoidant

Table 1. Couple diagnostic summary.

- When at A, avoid regressing into C (creating symmetry at C) during your partner's poor quality displays of C.
- Recognize that anger is always poor-quality C, but C nevertheless.
- When you are at C, know what you want before you initiate discussion.
- Attempting to explain oneself, defending actions, and reacting too sensitively is moving into C.
- When at C, raise only one issue at a time.
- Signal a switch from A to C (e.g., "Are you done? Can I tell you what I felt?")
- Control the intensity of C, or stop talking.
- Ask for anything you want at C, but be able to accept "No."

Strengthening Non-Dominant Patterns

Couples who recognize a semi-rigid or rigid pattern can strengthen their non-dominant interaction through practice. The more rigid a couple's pattern, either in the traditional or non-traditional direction, the more work that needs to be done in UL and LL quadrants. This work entails integrating what is held as shadow in the UL that may have been repressed during an individual's developmental history, yet continues to impinge upon the quality of the intimate relationship. Noam (1988; cf Forman, 2010) called some of these unconscious pressures "encapsulated identities" that result in "downward/upward causations." Some of this work might necessitate the involvement of a professional to both uncover unconscious experiences and to achieve integration. LL influences concerning gender roles, what it means to be a couple, and the cultural notions of romantic love need to be explored. The latter issues are relevant, especially at the Roles and Relational stages of a couple's development when pre-transcendent ideals are forming unrealistic expectations and increasing inaccurate interpretation at C.

Exceptional relationships are built, not discovered, reflecting a quality of presence (Kafni, 2012). Focused intention and awareness increases this possibility. Therefore, at A we are creating a safe invitation for our partner to become fully present and transparent at C. We are mindful of the sensitivities associated with regression and are opening a space for them to be heard, understood, and to experience our compassion and empathy. We are not overreacting to poor bids for connection. We are always prepared for a harsh and panicked initiation of C, determined to avert derailment when our partner lapses into the use of anger or withdrawal. This resolute strength at A avoids the accumulation of painful symmetrical exchanges at C that burdens most relationships. Some things are best left unstated between partners until later. This dyadic stability, combined with preparation and awareness, is evidence that the couple has achieved the Relational stage of development.

At the Relational stage the couple has successfully laid down the A/C interactional pattern they can rely upon when tension builds. When A/C interactions have a stabilizing effect, this leads to improvements in intimacy, problem-solving, task assignments, alternating leadership, navigation of crises, and more. There is also progress in how to parent and engage family and friends. Communication actually accomplishes a positive outcome at a modest frequency. Reciprocity and flexibility are predominant. The practice of flexibility due to A/C awareness promotes further adaptation and creativity. The couple is working together at a functional level and this is a highly desirable outcome of successful couples therapy. However, the Relational stage couple still lives without a fully developed empathic appreciation achieved that is developed at the next stage, First Love. At the Relational Stage the pre- transcendent fallacy of early love has not been relinquished, and consequently the couple cannot feel the love from daily awareness of how much their partner does day-in and day-out to build a life with them (Habib, 2014). Thus, a diminishment of love's depth and interactional failure is more likely at this stage when their gaze moves backwards to the pre/trans experience. This gaze backwards lessens their appreciation of their partner in the present, as well as both of their state experiences.

Self-awareness can bring an empathic intention to how we reveal dependency and other aspects of the deeper self. At C we are committed to communicating needs to our partner with transparency and without anger. This makes it much easier for a partner to realize what is needed in these moments, to respond more effectively, and to remain at A until a satisfactory equilibrium is achieved. Familiarity with our internal world and a series of successfully completed reciprocal interactions eventually comes with the realization that *skilled* C inherently draws people in and facilitates engagement. We realize that people feel privileged to be included in our personal needs. Through our disclosure they experience personal discovery, affirmation, and feelings of love. We learn that dependency and vulnerability are gifts we give to people with whom we feel safe and trust. Our capacity to express a healthy C allows us to replenish vital resources, and it also establishes a pathway for vertical integration of what could remain as shadow. Finally, it improves the quality of our role at A through an informed awareness of our own regression at C.

Conclusion

This article explored the central role of regression as an essential component in dyadic intimacy. Reoccurring LR patterns that structure regression into more stable patterns were identified, and diagnostic nomenclature has been described that highlights pattern strengths and weaknesses. The role of dyadic power and easily utilized rules of A/C interaction were set forth. The majority of couples inhabit the Roles or Relational stage of development, where successful patterns of A/C interaction are needed to promote healthy regression, greater intimacy, and further integration.

The development of the A/C model stems from 30 years of experience in couples therapy. It grew from a need to calm chaotic dyadic processes in which couples frequently present in a clinical setting. There was an urgency to identify unmet underlying needs that intensified the couple's experience. The goal was to provide easily recognized interactional patterns that couples could identify and thus provide heuristic choices for improved interaction with one's partner. The A/C model supports LR interactional dyadic stability from which UL and LL influences can be discovered and integrated. The triage of couple's needs, often presenting in crisis and with depleted resources, necessitates quickly addressing the systemic breakdown of LR processes. Stabilizing the regressive process is initially accomplished by a clinician taking firm control to prevent damaging expressions of anger that could render the treatment process unsafe. Soon after, couples find significant value in quickly adopting the goal to avoid symmetry at C and early stage structuring of A/C interaction. These injunctions come with the goal to prioritize the dyadic *process* over resolving *content* for a brief period of time, which means a conflict is deliberately left unresolved if communication deteriorates to C–C interchanges.

The AQAL model is especially applicable to the conceptualization, growth, and treatment of intimate couples. In intimacy we are surely all "in over our heads" (Kegan, 1994), given that our highest hopes and aspirations routinely collide with our most regressive features. Almost everyone is aware of how challenging and unruly the intimate experience can become. In part, this is because the intimate encounter is a relationship where unfamiliar and multiple aspects of our developmental histories emerge and merge. Cultures have limited time to prepare young people to couple well. Nevertheless, the couple must function as the cornerstone of the family. The absence of an integral framework has left the preponderance of practitioners and researchers with overwhelming complexity and without an integrating theory. The Integral model provides a lattice upon which to sort out the complexity of intimacy, a way to ensure a comprehensive empirical inquiry, and the possibility to achieve a comprehensive approach to intimacy.

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NOTES

[1] The amount of regression in intimate relationships has likely swelled as more couples make increasing movement from a Roles-based relationship toward a Relational stage of development. Whereas the expression of feelings may have been culturally ascribed to women prior to the 1960s, this began to change as the cultural values shifted to include partnership aspirations and promote masculine expression of feeling. Consequently, I suspect that couple regression has become significantly more complex and frequent since the source of feelings now includes those produced by men.

[2] Moffitt et al. (1997) looked at emotional regulation among couples but the study was criticized for poor inter-rater reliability. (cf Snyder et al., 2006).

[3] Markman et al. (2010) use a scheme detailed within their widely utilized and researched PREP program that has similarities with A/C but it does not address the regression. They utilize the Speaker–Listener technique, where one partner is "the speaker" expressing his or her concerns while the other partner is "the listener" reflecting back what the speaker is saying. Given the unique role that regression has in intimacy, communication training in itself is frequently limited (Owen et al., 2013) in regulating powerful emotions. Gottman (2013) has emphasized that a couple must overlearn these techniques in order to have them readily available to use during conflict (regression). A clinician must assess the availability of these strategies during moments of conflict and regression to insure their utility.

[4] There are similarities but important differences from the proposed model from TA. The definitions of how Child and Adult are defined are important. In TA, the Child "represents the recordings in the brain of internal events associated with external events the child perceives" (Harris, 1969). All of the events occur from birth until five years of age. The proposed model's definition of C includes the effects of this early childhood development but it also includes dependency needs that are *not regressive* especially evident in first love and spiritual stages of a couples development. The healthy child in the propose model is further defined below in light of flexible complementary interactions.

Harris defines the Adult as "a data-processing computer, which grinds out decisions after computing the information from three sources; the parent, the child, and the data which the adult has gathered and is gathering." In the proposed model, focusing only upon the intimate dyad, the adult role is limited to reflective listening and/or giving. The models share in the necessity of "restraint" much needed during A interactions. In addition to couples TA is much more widely applied to children, adolescents, and adults and to nations, religion, adoption, child abuse and more.

There is important divergence between the models in defining a complementary interaction. In TA, "…the transaction is complementary and can go on indefinitely…when the transaction makes 'parallel lines'." In TA parlance, the response of one's partner echoes the path of the stimulus. Thus, the most "functional transaction" that is also complementary due to the match in stimulus and response is the A–A. C–C transactions in TA can be complementary, especially during play, but because of the lack of "stroking" the relationship becomes "uncomplimentary, or dies of boredom." In the proposed model, C–C transactions are frequently volatile and intense and are described as symmetry. A complementary interaction in the proposed model "completes something else or makes better" by adopting corresponding roles of giving and receiving or A-C. In TA, this interaction is defined as complementary *providing* the stimulus is originating from C and pulling for A from a person willing to play this role. When they are unwilling to play this role it results in a "crossed transaction." In the proposed models one is ether giving or receiving and if this

is not occurring a member of the party is disengaging and withdrawing (the role of boundaries will be explored in an article now being written). This withdrawing partner may indeed say something harsh like "grow-up, you always are complaining of something," which would be interpreted in TA as Parent and in the proposed model as a poor quality C. Finally, although TA would call an A-A interaction complementary the proposed model terms it symmetry at A. Although both models agree this can be a highly desirable and a frequently useful interchange, the proposed model views symmetry at A when rigid as problematic. Due to developmental experiences resulting in the over use of denial and repression the couple spends too much time in this interaction and thus the rigidity. Although relatively rare, I have seen couples with the presenting problem "we lack passion," and as expected they are conflict avoiders. These couples can be asexual because all regression feels dangerous. Consequently, the relationship fails to meet the regressive needs of either partner. The proposed model calls this rigid symmetry at A–A.

Finally, the observance of flexible or rigid complementarity is put forth as an essential dynamic in the proposed model. A central tenant is that the regressive needs of each partner is a worthwhile focal point and must be accommodated in the intimate relationship as evidenced by *flexible* complementary interchanges. Although it values the stabilizing effects of the A role similar to TA, it highlights the central importance of C and how this regression and potentially sensitive transparency (at later stages) enhances the feelings of intimacy for both members. Thus, C is not limited to a static collection of childhood memories but rather an evolving dimension and reservoir of capability to connect with people. This is the *healthy C* having representation in both past and recent experiences. This is not to be confused with A in TA analysis, which admittedly draws from C. In the proposed model, when C is defended against, for example, traditional role assignments or inhibited due to developmental trauma we frequently find *rigid* complementary relationships. A clinician or couple aware of this pattern perhaps would work respectively in zones 3 and then 4 or within 1 and then 2 to help achieve awareness and perspective.

[5] *Traditional* and *non-traditional* refer to LL cultural influences that have advantages and disadvantages for each of us. These cultural influences have already begun to fade as we move further along into partnership. In the LGBT Community, the traditional and non-traditional designation likely has no applicability. I do believe, however, all other aspects of this model are applicable. However, I have not had the fortune to work with enough couples in the LGBT community to more fully understand the strengths and limitations of this model for these couples. This application still needs more development. Finally the traditional and non-traditional distinction likely does not hold up across all cultures or socioeconomic levels.

[6] Power at C at the upper stages can be poignant, invoking empathy, nurturance, or even a successful C–C interchange. Power is the ability to influence both positively *or* negatively. At the upper stages of First Love or Spiritual, a couple is not as dependent upon ruptures in connection (Hendrix, 2001) or other disappointments to initiate the C role as couples at relational stages.

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