

Valentine's Day is just three weeks away! Do you have a date? Have you made the reservation? The season obsessed with romantic love is approaching, and we at *Las Traumadas* want to give you a behind the scenes take on all of your true loves and heartbreaks.

Think about your relationships, the serious and no-strings-attached ones alike. Do they follow a similar pattern? You date partners who are jealous, emotionally unavailable, or they act like they *need* you. Or do your relationships more or less end the same: you are infatuated in the beginning only to suddenly lose gas and realize you've been running on fumes; you are begging for someone's time; you are giving much more than you are getting from a relationship. You know what I'm talking about. I saw you making a face.

Why do we find ourselves in these patterns? Why do we act out the same behaviors over and over again?

Las Traumadas

#9

Well it's because we learned these behaviors during childhood with our primary caregivers. This pattern of behavior is called **reenactment**: "repeat[ing] the repressed material as a contemporary experience, instead of. . . remembering it as something belonging to the past."³ In other words, we're subconsciously performing a learned behavior in our romantic relationships.

Now that we know why we find ourselves in these patterns, let's talk about how they started.

Trusting that your needs will be met is the basis of all healthy relationships. Every individual has physical and emotional needs: food, water, shelter, love, respect. (For the full list check out Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.)⁴

If we can rely on our caregivers to provide us with what we need, we learn to trust. Learning to trust whether or not our needs can be met happens between birth and about age five, and this knowledge remains deeply ingrained in our psyche.⁶ During this time, you establish either adaptive or maladaptive behaviors. **Adaptive Behaviors** are pretty straight forward: you form healthy relationships and work through conflict appropriately. **Maladaptive Behaviors** are categorized in many different ways but come down to the same idea: you form unhealthy relationships and do not deal with conflict appropriately.⁵

Let's face it- in a society that so often devalues emotional connection, a lot of us end up with caregivers who are unreliable. If your needs aren't met, it's not as if they just disappear. To cope with these unmet needs, we establish *maladaptive*

behaviors to compensate for what's missing. This could look like being manipulative, controlling, distant, clingy, etc. Many of us have behavioral patterns we need to break.²

Essentially, whether it serves you or not, the behaviors you learned in early childhood affect the way you behave in romantic relationships and relate to your partners. Here's the crazy part: since romantic reenactments can't be a one man show, we subconsciously find partners who are compatible with our specific *maladaptive behaviors*. If you were controlled as a child, your *maladaptive behavior* will be to let someone control you. If you were verbally abused, your *maladaptive behavior* may be to look for someone who subconsciously seeks abuse. Let's look at a few more examples to better understand how *reenactments* happen.

Anita

Anita's mother was emotionally

distant with her daughter. As a child, Anita was only able to understand that her need for intimate connection was not met. This resulted in Anita feeling rejected and unworthy of her mother's love; Anita did everything she could to meet the need that her mother couldn't fulfill. This included things like trying to take care of her mother and listening to her problems.

In romantic relationships, Anita seeks out partners who are emotionally distant. Anita tries to take care of and be there for her partners, even though they cannot be there for her, and she gives way more than she gets out of relationships. **Anita's maladaptive behavior is to take care of people who can't reciprocate.** It is her subconscious belief that if she is giving enough, she can be the reason her partners learn to be emotionally intimate, much like she believed

taking care of her mother would achieve that emotional intimacy. Little did she know she was trying to fill an emotional void from her childhood. We hope Anita reads our zine.

Luke

Luke's father would constantly compare himself to his co-workers and friends, pointing out different ways in which he was more accomplished than them. Everyone in his father's life was viewed as a competitor, even close friends. A high value on accomplishment paired with seeing others as competitors created insecurities in Luke. His belief was that he would never be good enough unless he was the best; that's a lot of pressure on one little guy.

Moving forward, he carried deep rooted insecurities into adulthood. In order to feel secure with a romantic partner, he needed to create that insecurity in them as well.



Luke compared his partner to other people constantly, spoke about people close to them in condescending ways, and valued his accomplishments more than anything else- acting out the *maladaptive behaviors* he learned in early childhood. This way of communicating created insecurity in his partners and in his relationships. **Creating insecurity in himself and others is Luke's maladaptive behavior.** Even though he was unhappy with his behavior and the results every time, this was the only script Luke knew.

These are only a few examples of the ways individuals cope with the relationship model given to them by their caregivers. It comes down to seeking what we already know. **So how do we break out of these patterns that can do us more harm than good?**

there for her, but she recognized that her life had given her reason to feel this way and she validated the emotions. If she did not give space for herself to feel those things, it would hinder her ability to have healthy relationships in the future. Everything you are feeling is valid!

4. LET GO: It was hard to come to terms with the fact that she was subconsciously seeking partners who were emotionally distant; however, she was grateful for the lessons she learned, gave them space on a mental bookshelf labeled "badassery emotional work" for future reference, and let that old pain go with love. On to bigger, better things- like healthy, fulfilling, two-sided relationships!

You can research the specifics of your situation, read books, listen to podcasts, and journal to work through the wounds that led to your *reenactments*. It can be pretty difficult to

A good place to start is the healing process explained in issues #3-7 of *Las Traumadas*.

Let's catch up with Anita:

1. LISTEN to yourself: Anita started to take note of how her romantic relationships began, what she felt, what her partners' characteristics were, and how things progressed. She realized she was often involved with partners who were emotionally distant. These relationships made her feel like she was clinging to inklings of their attention. That didn't feel good.

2. IDENTIFY the cause: After doing some research, journaling, and speaking with a counselor, Anita realized her mother was emotionally distant. Since she was unable to receive the love and attention she needed in childhood, she was still seeking it in romantic partners.

3. VALIDATE the emotion: A lot of shame and regret followed Anita for choosing partners who could not be

work on changing a pattern so deeply woven into who you are on your own, though, especially if you're not familiar with emotional jargon. A counselor has the knowledge to help you identify your patterns and see which areas need healing! Also, make sure to check out our bibliography for some useful resources.

We know this seems like a lot of work- because, quite frankly, it is. But just like a car, a bike, a computer, your emotions need a tune up every now and then. Oil and grease em' up as necessary. If left unattended, your machines can break down. Don't live with your heart space broken down.

"No pain is so devastating as the pain a person refuses to face and no suffering is so lasting as suffering left unacknowledged."

-Cermak & Brown

You didn't have a choice in learning your relationship model,

but you can choose to break your patterns of *maladaptive behavior*. Not only is it your choice, it's your responsibility to address negative, and at times destructive, *reenactments*. If you avoid doing the emotional work, you will continue to be a part of unhealthy relationships. Not only does this hurt you, it also hurts those around you; like your romantic partners and your friends who witness the relationships that ultimately won't meet your needs and make you happy.

We at *Las Traumadas* believe one of the greatest things a person can do is unravel their own emotional mysteries. If you are aware of your own behaviors and how you react to others, you can be a part of healthier relationships and demonstrate to others how to act in healthy relationships. What would the world look like if we all were actively working to understand ourselves and each other?

Let's do something now.*

Here's a writing exercise to get your brain jogging about your *reenactments*.

1. Think of your caregivers and pick one. In three words, how did they behave when you were younger?
(Examples: distressed, distant, grateful, honest, anxious)
2. How did these behaviors make you feel?
(Examples: insecure, dumb, pretty, exceptional, alone, ignored)

**From the Editor:*

The writer and editor of Issue #9 of *Las Traumadas* are not certified counselors or psychologists. If you don't think you will be safe completing this exercise alone or feel unsafe at any point during the exercise, please stop and complete it with a counselor present. You don't need to be a psychologist to practice emotional intelligence; however, it is a priority to the writer, editor, and all contributors of *Las Traumadas* that you are safe when doing your emotional work. Thanks for being here.

On top of that, guess what? You deserve healing. You deserve a healthy relationship. You, despite any and every infraction you may have committed at the sake of another's soul, deserve the ability to love and to be loved. We all do.

Thanks for being here,

Las Traumadas.

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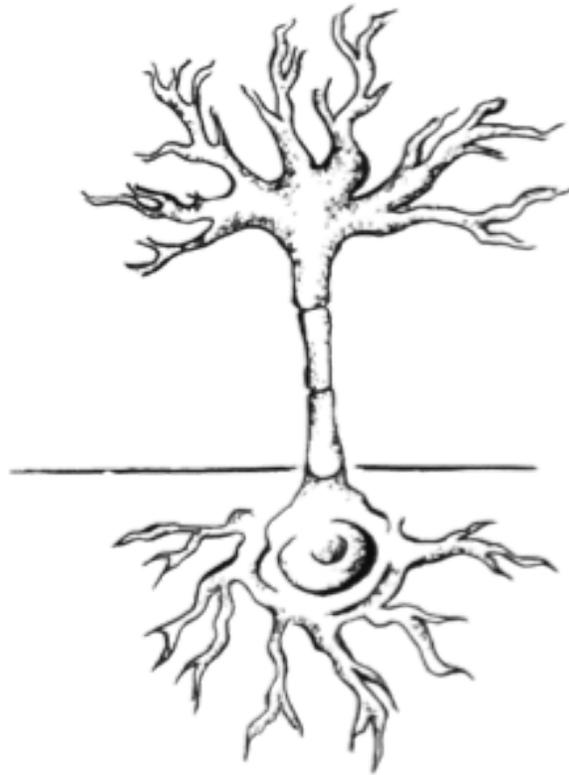
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3. My caregiver made me feel _____ (answer from #2). Today I see myself performing that emotion when I _____.
(Examples: put my partners on a pedestal; don't act myself around my partners; make my partner feel dumb; experience anxiety when my partner is away from me)

4. Do you want this behavior to change? If so, what emotions do you want to feel in a relationship?
(Examples: respect, admiration, challenged)

5. What emotions do you want your partner to feel?
(Examples: valued, trusted, secure)

6. How can you change your behavior to meet your needs?
(Examples: stop pulling away from people who care about me; stop staying with partners who are controlling; stop putting my partner down)



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