

Intimate Partners

Chapter 12

Classic System: The Silent Husband and the Hysterical Wife

There is no clearer, more commonly encountered example of a projective identification system than that seen in the relationship of the nonexpressive husband and his voluble, highly emotional wife. In this kind of marriage, each spouse has his or her own area of specialization. One partner carries all of the expressivity, warmth and feeling in the intimate system, while the other is in charge of cool rationality, attention to detail, and logic.

Angie and Bob Carrano, in their mid thirties at the time of our interviews, happened to be from a working-class Italian background. But theirs was a type of relationship that I saw over and over again, in every social, ethnic and economic class and group. Marriages much like that of the Carranos are particularly frequent in academic families and among executives, lawyers, and scientists; the husbands, in these relationships, have a propensity to the obsessional pursuit of order, detail and knowledge, while their wives take care of "feelings" for the pair of them.

Often, in such marriages, the male partner is someone who is extremely successful and highly functional professionally. In his intimate life, however, he is patently dysfunctional- as is his spouse-for they inhabit a system which is emotionally unhealthy and deeply ungratifying for both of them. These partners are caught in a mutually collusive, projective identification arrangement, involving a husband who cannot be emotionally expressive and a wife who cannot be anything but.

"He Never Attracted Me"

The Carranos, married fourteen and a half years, had two children: Cathy, age ten, and Robert, almost seven. They had, as well, a tall, trim semidetached house in the Elkins Park area, just outside Philadelphia's northernmost city limit. Bob Carrano, who'd changed jobs during the previous month (October) in order to avoid the night shift, worked as a printer. He was employed, at present, by a large suburban newspaper. The disadvantage of the new job was that it was located an inconveniently long distance away. Getting back and forth involved a grueling hour-plus drive, with bad traffic in both directions.

Angie Dinelli Carrano had been a secretary and managed a small insurance office before her marriage, but now worked part-time as a waitress. When I asked them what had, initially, attracted them to one another, the wife laughed and the husband smiled. (Such responses to that particular question were so common that I was far from surprised.)

But then Angie said that she could not remember ever being attracted to her husband at all.

"I was . . .", she hesitated, then shrugged, "I didn't like him. I wasn't, I mean, drawn to him in the slightest." She had, she explained, been "sort of preengaged" to someone who was in the army and away in Germany, and she had been feeling empty and lonely and sad. "Two of my girlfriends, who'd met Bob previously to me, said, 'Oh, you've got to come out!' "she explained, automatically mimicking the breathless, excited way in which the invitation had been given. "They said they'd met these real nice guys ... and I was feeling so depressed at that point. I'm very depression-prone," she added, in a suddenly subdued, almost whispering tone of voice.

But the depression that she'd been in, when she'd met Bob, had been the first really bad one ever. "I was sixteen, at the time or was I seventeen?" She turned, appealed to her husband, who sat next to her on the sofa. He shook his head, shrugged, but made no other response. "Well, regardless," she said.

"Sixteen," he muttered, after a moment, but Angie, sweeping ahead, did not stop to react to his statement. "So I'd been feeling down at that time, just staying home and brooding, and he wanted to go out with me right from the beginning I think?" Again she turned, looked at Bob for confirmation. "When you first met me, isn't that right?" She didn't pause long enough for him to answer.

"But because he was extremely introverted and shy-my husband is extremely shy"--she stopped to observe, as if describing an absent third party-"it took him a long, long time to ask me."

Bob Carrano laughed, a short bark, though I was at a loss to understand why.

"At that point, I went out with him just to kill time," his wife was saying, "and that lasted for three and a half years, and we got married."

She stopped. I waited for some reaction, on Bob Carrano's part, to this annihilating historical account, but none at all was forthcoming.

"What had you been depressed about, before meeting him?" I asked, finally. "Before meeting Bob," I amended hastily, for I had almost fallen into Angie's manner of speaking about her spouse as if he were somehow not present and with us in this comfortably furnished basement family room.

"Oh, it was him I was depressed about. That other fellow the one I'd been seeing. I just couldn't cope with that whole relationship and yet was so very, very involved with him. When I say 'very involved,' "she rushed on, "I don't mean 'sexually involved'; things weren't the same, fifteen years ago, as they are now; a nice Italian girl didn't do that! I just mean emotionally ... very, very involved...." Her voice level had fallen precipitously, in the course of these comments, so that I had to lean forward to hear her. "We'd been going out for three years, and it had started when I was thirteen-twelve or thirteen?" Again she looked around at her husband questioningly.

It seemed an odd question for her to be asking him to answer. He was her mate, not her parent, and had not even been part of her life at that juncture. This mixture of anger and dependence would, I thought, inevitably be confusing and difficult to deal with. But Bob, a patient expression upon his features, looked as if he were trying to make the calculation for which she'd asked.

"I think, in retrospect-because of my horrendous relationship with my parents, and my home life- that I'd taken a very, very strong attachment." Angie, after a brief pause, had decided that the point of fact she'd queried Bob about did not really merit her halting the drive of her discourse.

"There was a very, very strong attachment to this man," she repeated the same words but with an added intensity. "Because he showed interest in me and because I cared about him! When he got drafted, I was devastated. As if-oh, it was like having the rug pulled out from under my entire life! And I just brooded and brooded and got into a very severe depression. "She was speaking, now, in a melodramatic whisper, like a little girl telling a ghost story.

What, I asked her, in a practical tone of voice, had eventually become of that man who'd gone off to the service and left her pining so unhappily behind? "He's no good," Angie replied, her facial expression shifting from sorrow to contempt. He was, she continued, addicted to drug&-"a total loser"-and she'd been aware of this throughout the three years during which the pair of them had been involved. "I knew he was a druggie, and that was partially . . ." She left the sentence unfinished. "The thing was," she began anew, "I didn't know what love was, at that time. I was very, very confused."

"I Knew He Would Be My Daddy"

She probably had, she went on disjointedly, cared for her husband when they'd gotten together, more, perhaps, than she herself had realized. "I believe, in retrospect, that I married Bob because I knew what he was," she stated, in a tone that bespoke pride in her choice. But then she went on to say, "I knew he would be my daddy, so to speak, and he would provide for me, and I would never hurt and never have to worry about taking care of myself." What had begun as an affectionate-sounding statement became mocking and sarcastic as she continued. It wasn't clear, however, whether this sarcasm was directed by Angie at herself or whether it was directed at Bob.

"I have told my husband many times," she added, in an imperious, almost declamatory tone, "that he's lived up to his bargain; he's been just everything that I expected him to be, or wanted him to be, at the age of nineteen! But what has occurred is," her voice was dropping, again, to the lowered, muted levels of grief and disappointment, "that what I wanted at nineteen, as I've found, fifteen years later, at age thirty-four, is not-" She stopped there, as if stymied, and merely threw her arms wide as if to indicate that no words could suffice. What was happening in her life could not be contained by speech.

"Naturally, people change." Angie sounded, all of a sudden, completely objective and reasonable. "I myself have changed drastically, and he has remained what he was when I married him-the guardian, the overseer and the provider." Bob sat there, quietly, beside her-a well-muscled, dark-haired, dark-bearded, athletic-looking sort of man. "But as far as me seeing him in the role of man, lover, husband, it has become very, very difficult for me," his wife said.

She talked easily, fluently, but seemed to take little responsibility for what had been said a moment earlier. "So you were not really totally unattracted by Bob," I pointed out to her. "You were attracted by the idea of a partner who was stable and who would be able to take care of you?"

"Yes!" She leaned forward in her seat, as if intrigued by such a notion. "Because I had never been with anybody like that before." "Never been with anybody stable?" I wanted to ask, but she did not give me the opportunity to do it. "I have, unfortunately-maybe because of my upbringing, or what I am, genetically-never been able to acknowledge my sexuality. I never have. So, when I married my husband, I was not sexually attracted to him.... I was still a baby, sexually and emotionally, and I hadn't any notion about what to expect. I just thought, because of being a virgin when I got married, that 'Wow, everybody talks about how great sex is' and that this would happen to me!" Angie, laughing bitterly, slapped herself across her own forehead. "Not having any sexual feelings for him, what in God's name made me think they were all of a sudden going to happen?"

A Hard Decision

She had not, repeated Angie, been sexually attracted to her husband at the time of their wedding. There was, she stated it again, "no physical attraction to him whatsoever." But that, she observed, "had nothing to do with him." I stared at her. "My husband is a very-well, that's another whole story that we can get into later on. . . ." She shrugged her narrow shoulders, ran an impatient hand through her gently wavy shoulder-length hair, which was blue-black and as glossy as a raven's feathers. She was narrow-featured, almost birdlike in the intensity of her stare as well, and her physique was small, slender and compact. But when she began speaking, she seemed to enlarge almost visibly and to dominate everything that transpired.

I asked her if she had been sexually attracted to that former boyfriend, the one who had been drafted and then sent off to Germany just before her meeting Bob. Angie replied, huskily, that she had been. "Very much so," she added, but then said immediately, "He, of course, was a lamebrain."

I knew that I was intelligent enough," her voice was thoughtful and speculative, "and had a high enough IQ, though emotionally, I've had many problems.... And I knew that if I ever ended up with him, my life would be horrible absolutely horrendous." She rolled the r's of the word with an almost eager relish, like a spinster discussing the

disasters that had followed an ill-advised sexual liaison. "He quit school at age seventeen, and he could never hold a job; he was just a loser," Angie ended by stating emphatically.

But then she resumed again at once. She had had, on her own part, a difficult decision to make. "Do you marry someone who attracts you physically," the question was being asked in a somewhat oratorical, rhetorical tone," but who will give you a difficult life-and you know, by the way, what will happen to the physical aspect of it in those kinds of circumstances? Or, do you marry someone who you can depend on to be there for you, given that you're as nervous and wired up and emotional as I am?"

I didn't know whether or not she expected me to respond. The answer to this question was that it had no answer-at least none that an outside person could possibly supply. I merely shrugged, then remarked, "If you had married that other person, you'd have had to be there for him."

"Oh definitely, definitely! I would have had an awful life," agreed Angie, at once. "But perhaps had more power and control in the relationship?" I essayed. "Right," she concurred readily but at the same time shook her head in the negative, so that she seemed to be both agreeing and disagreeing at the same time.

Seeking Autonomy

"Ours is a strange relationship, because I have-I really do-" Angie hesitated, turned to Bob. "I do have control as far as making the decisions is concerned?" Before he could respond, she swiveled around in her seat, tucked her wool trousered legs up beneath her, and was looking at me once again. "My husband is a very laid-back person. He is not a decision maker. I don't think he's ever made five major decisions in the fourteen years that I'm married to him." He moved, restlessly, beside her. "I'm sorry." Angie turned to him, her voice honeyed with regret. "I don't mean to speak for-" "No, it's okay," Bob said.

"I'm the family decision maker," his wife went on to explain. "I bought this house. I was still into the marriage scene at that time," she put in parenthetically, her voice heavy with irony, "so I always came to him with anything I was planning to do. In these latter years, I just make decisions and carry them out," Angie added, lips pursed in angry disapproval.

But then an embarrassed expression crossed her face, and she amended her last statement by adding piously, "Which is not right, of course, and I know it's not right; but I don't even bother consulting him. What's the use? He's always going to say, 'Whatever you like,' 'Whatever you want,' so I just don't bother asking and do it anyway!" Her wrathfulness, an ever-present current of emotion, was carrying her away from the subject at hand; she seemed, suddenly, to realize this. "I'm sorry, I'm getting off the point...." Angie blushed slightly, sounding contrite. '

"So you feel that you are the one who's in charge of the show here?" I asked her. "You are the show, in terms of who can make the decisions, since Bob, you say, doesn't even get into the act?" I spoke mildly, and smiled too, in order to temper the frankly political, undeniably aggressive aspects of these questions, but she didn't smile back. "Yes," her voice was aggrieved, "but in terms of ultimately being able to be autonomous . . . can I?"

This question was, like the previous one, not to be responded to by me; it was to be answered by she who had posed it, herself. "Definitely not" was Angie's reply. A moment later she added, as if reacting to an objection coming from myself or from Bob, "Never.. It would be impossible." That word-"autonomy." What, I inquired, was its meaning to her? She had, perhaps, been giving this matter some thought, for she answered without hesitating, "Being able to run my life, run the whole show, on my own."

"It sounds as if you're doing that already," I observed. She nodded. "I know."

"But," she went on, sounding doubtful, "when I fall . . . and I fall often . . ." Her unfinished sentence trailed off into the implication that she needed, when she fell, to be sure that someone would be there to catch her. "Four years ago, Bob had to literally carry me in to see a therapist," Angie resumed. "That was the position I was in, at that point. I do have a tendency to become--emotionally-totally nonfunctional and inadequate."

This was said with so much flair and drama that I asked her whether or not Bob had actually carried her there, in his arms when she'd needed to go and see a clinician. Angie shrugged. "Well, not literally."

"But I was a vegetable, a total vegetable; you can't imagine what I was like!" So she was, I commented equably, either the supercompetent decision maker, taking complete charge, or in the baby position-totally needy and out of control.

"Yes." Angie nodded her wholehearted agreement. I turned my head slightly to gaze directly at Bob. "What attracted you to this lady?" I asked him, in a slightly jocular tone that made them both smile. Bob, slow to answer, filled a space of time with a brief, gruffly masculine laugh. Finally, though, he did speak. "She was, oh, attractive, vibrant... And of course, being young, you want to meet a young girl and take her out. So it went from there; it just grew rapidly. It went from one night to every night with Angie, and nothing with the guys. . . . They used to kid me about it and say, 'We don't see you anymore; what's happening?' "There was happiness in his voice." "You know what it's like," he met my eyes, directly, "seven days, seven nights a week...."

"So you just fell in love?" I asked.

"I just wanted-" he began to reply, but Angie interfered.

"I think it important that you know," she started, then turned to Bob, asking with elaborate politeness, "if you don't mind my telling her this?" He said nothing, stared at her without answering.

"Last Thursday night I asked my husband for a separation," she turned back to me to say, "and I think it was the first time he was ever aware of how strong I feel about being alone and about needing time alone. I thought-I believed it was all settled, but yesterday he informed me that he is not leaving. Maybe I didn't stress the importance of this to him enough!" Her position, as stated, was one of pathos and weakness, yet she sounded passionate, triumphant and strong. "Maybe I didn't get him to understand how, having gone from a helpless child under my parents' rule to a helpless child under his rule, I never became a self. I never found myself ... and I still haven't!"

I glanced down at the Carranos' family genogram on my lap. There was not very much information sketched on the page, and very little more, I realized, would be added during the course of this afternoon's interview. Angie was, by the sheer force of other anxiety and emotionality, taking over the proceedings entirely. It was a form of theater, and I could either attempt to ring down the curtain and conduct the interview as planned or settle back and watch matters develop. I decided upon the latter course and closed the art tablet in a studied and obvious way. The young matron, whose intense gaze overlooked no detail, apologized to me immediately. I answered that we could, quite easily, return to the genogram at a later date. Bob followed this exchange, his expression affable, but he added no comment to it.

An Unresolvable Conundrum

"I felt, and I tried so hard to get this across to my husband," Angie went on to explain, her expression agonized, "that if I could struggle alone for a while, with the children and really know what it was like to be in control of myself-not know that he'd be there if I fall--it would be so important to me ... It is so important to me!" She'd changed tenses as if to change her statement from a wish to an act in the present. "So very important to me," she insisted.

It was, I thought, an unresolvable conundrum, a self-contained paradox from which there was no obvious escape. Angie had married Bob so that he would, in her own words, be there for her; she considered herself emotionally needy and subject to periodic "falls" during which she required help in getting back on her mental feet, so to speak.

The problem was, however, that she now perceived this neediness as springing from a lack of maturity; she saw herself as never having grown up into a self-sufficient adult person. In order for her to do so, it was necessary for her to develop psychologically-to grow up into an independent and separate human being who is capable of surviving on her own. This was, of course, not really going to happen so long as she knew that Bob was there to catch her if she "fell" emotionally. If, on the other hand, she were really on her own, she might fall apart completely. Suppose, when she became "a vegetable"-a dysfunctional human being who had, furthermore, two young children to care for- she found herself unable to cope?

She could grow up only discovering that she could make it without Bob's being there for her, and if he was not there when she "fell," she feared she could not survive.

Angie was, therefore, in an untenable position, and so, obviously, was her partner. "I just felt-I just feel," she was insisting, playing spokesperson for one side of the ambivalence about independence and dependence, "that if I struggle alone for a while, with the kids, and really find out what it's like to be in control of myself and not know that he's there if I stumble -It's so important to me!" She was on the edge of her seat. "But he feels," her expression grew stony and contemptuous, "that if we separate there won't be any going back."

"Is that what you think?" I shifted my body completely, concentrating my total attention upon Bob. It was proving almost impossible to contact him directly. Given the diversions being offered by his wife, he withdrew into the scenery very easily. But he, after a few moments during which no distractions occurred, shrugged his muscular shoulders and said briefly, "I don't think it's going to help matters by separating. I just feel that sticking together and trying to fight this thing, one more time . . ." His voice trailed off, and he merely shrugged once again.

"Fight this thing?" I shook my head as if to say I wasn't sure, precisely, what he was alluding to. "Well, you know, I have my hang-ups and my problems, and she has hers, and it's something married couples have to work on-" His voice, I thought, sounded bland and uninvolved. "With my husband," intruded Angie, "what you have to understand is-" She stopped, for Bob suddenly shifted his position on the sofa; the gesture was, unmistakably, meant to convey a sense of anger and impatience. "I'm sorry," she apologized, with demure and exaggerated courtesy.

"If you don't work on the marriage," he then proceeded stoutly, but he seemed to have nothing further on that subject to say. "These things happen, you know," he observed vaguely, after a brief silence. Angie swooped in again. "I have not ever tried to blame him for my condition," she declared.

She had known that she was prone to depression when she'd married him, she continued, but in the course of therapy she'd realized that the marriage was affecting her in ways that were profoundly destructive. "I was a total vegetable when I went into treatment-and I do have the capacity to become one again," she declared. "It took me a long time, working with my therapist, to realize-how dead the marriage was! And I've been able, only recently, to come to the point of being able to say, 'Well, this is dead; let's bury it.' So I didn't come to this decision lightly," she assured me.

I believed that she meant what she said. I suspected, however, that if Bob Carrano really did go upstairs and pack his bags, his wife would become utterly terrified-and do everything possible to prevent his going.

"He Does Not Communicate"

It had, Angie was saying, taken a great deal of thinking and of lying awake at night to bring her to ask him for a separation this past Thursday. "Without taking all the blame on myself, as I may sound like I'm doing right now," she told me, "you must know

that my husband is totally, totally introverted; we will go weeks without speaking. He does not communicate with me in any way!" Bob cleared his throat at that moment, and I hoped that he would interfere.

He didn't.

"Whatever communication is going on now, at this moment, is the most that will happen in the next five years!" I looked at Bob, but he turned away, looked over at the far left side of the room. Automatically, my gaze followed his. That area was furnished by a Leatherette bar and some barstools, and the walls behind it were decorated by Heineken and Budweiser Lite Beer signs-copies, I supposed, or perhaps the real thing, which had come into their possession in some way. That end of the room looked like a cozy small cafe, while the area in which we sat was clearly designated for family sitting, reading, and watching TV.

"My husband is just very-he has a lot of self-hatred," Angie was explaining, "and it's to the point where, if we go to a restaurant, he thinks that everyone is watching him eat. I don't want to go into all that-." She waved an arm airily, as if to brush Bob's personal difficulties away. "But consequently, because of the way he feels about himself ... I know he loves me dearly, but he cannot, cannot give of himself emotionally, affectionately; he just can't do it. And now," she was clenching her fists in her lap, "he wants to try!"

Frigid

Angie had escalated into a full-fledged tantrum, and yet, as if she'd reached the very top of a Ferris wheel, her mood seemed to turn and to begin shifting downward. When she spoke again, she sounded much less agitated; her mien was objective, even calm. "Unfortunately," she observed, like a physician discussing a patient with an interesting but incurable illness, "this rage and this anger that I have felt about his ignoring me for so many years have rendered me totally frigid. Frigid, completely! That's how I feel; it's 'Don't touch me; don't come near me; don't!' "Bob, a frightened look on his face, moved slightly farther away from her on the sofa." So it's a very big problem," said his wife.

"I know that I will never, never find anyone like him, and I wouldn't leave the marriage to find anyone else," she added, in a burst of unexpected, passionate loyalty. "Because there is no one who is as much a man-as loyal and honest as this man is--but on the other hand, I'm growing into a woman now, too. I have a woman's requirements, and what he's always given me (which is what I've always wanted) is a father/ daughter kind of pampering."

Bob jumped up from his seat at that moment, and for an instant I felt frightened-I didn't know why. But he merely went across the room to where the Leatherette bar stood and opened a refrigerator behind it. When he returned, he had a frosty can of Coca-Cola in his hand. Angie and I had cups of strong tea on the cocktail table before us; she picked up her cup, sipped from it, then replaced it in its saucer with a nervous clatter.

As he sat down and began to pry open the metal tab on the Coke container, I asked Bob, "How long have you been living without sex?" "It's not easy," he answered, concentrating on the task at hand. "It's been an awful long time." His head was bent over, but the skin on his neck looked mottled and flushed. "But, like I said, I don't think that separating now would do any good. She feels she needs the time to help herself out, emotionally, but then what would I be doing in the meanwhile?" He looked up at me, and met my gaze, but didn't see me; he seemed to be staring into a future alone.

"Okay," he muttered as if to himself, "I could be thinking, day in and day out, about getting back together and working out certain problems in the marriage, but then why go through all that aggravation? Explaining to the children why we are doing this ... I just don't want to hurt them, emotionally, either," he added. This last remark, undoubtedly his interpersonal trump card, was delivered with a certain authority and force.

"Where do you stand on that one?" I turned, immediately, to Angie. An uncertain expression crossed her features, but she shook her head as if to shake that uncertainty away. "Where he feels we will hurt them more by separating," she declared, "I feel I am hurting them so much more in this way-I don't have the patience, the understanding for them! It's just come to the point where the rage-and my daughter is getting the most of it-because he is so totally unattached to me, emotionally-" She stopped, blinked, looked around as if assessing her whereabouts. "I say she gets most of the anger, because my son and I mesh more easily. But Cathy really gets the brunt of the rage, and I am very afraid of becoming physically abusive, because I was an abused child myself." Angie, out of breath, paused. I turned to Bob.

"That's why," she began anew, "I've always' been very cautious in that area, and I haven't been lately. I've found myself throwing her around and doing things I'd never have thought of doing previously! He gets very angry with me without trying to get to the root of what all of this rage and this fury is about."

The Abuser

"Tell me your side of all of this, Bob." I asked him quietly.
"How do you see what's happening in the family right now?"

"How do I see it?" He repeated the question blankly.

"The things that Angie has been saying," I prompted him. "What is your own view of them?" He shrugged, sighed, said that he agreed with much of what she had said. "I realize that I'm the kind of guy-that some of my hang-ups have caused a lot of the problems in this marriage. And I would like to work on that. We've talked this over, time and time again, in the past. It's just-we have to do something about it! Instead of just talking, and then what does all of it end up meaning anyway? You settle it, two weeks go by, and you're just in the same old rut. I mean these are things you have to fight and to work on every day ... every day. Take each day as it comes, and try to work on them. I've talked about this in the past, and she has the right to not believe me anymore. That's her right," he stated, a message couched in confusion and vagueness.

He sounded as if he were not really involved so much as saying garbled things which might include something that his wife would like to hear.

Angie Carrano had, I reflected, admitted having married her husband because she needed to have someone be there for her, even though no real emotional connection existed. Bob seemed, at present, to have very similar requirements: He wanted to have his wife be there for him, even though he didn't actually seem to need or want a true affectional relationship. He wanted the marriage, he was clear about that, but did he, I wondered, want her?

Perhaps it was the possibility of abandonment, not the loss of a loved partner, that he feared?

"I'm taking all the blame here." Angie, nervously extracting a cigarette from a pack, repeated the remark that she had made a short time earlier: "But he has been genuinely cruel to me, genuinely abuse, in a way! I do think-and have come up with the feeling-that to ignore someone completely can be very, very abusive." She picked up a lighter on the table, inhaled, coughed slightly, blew the smoke out.

"Just like beating someone or mentally or verbally abusing them," she continued, and coughed lightly once again. "When I became pregnant with our second child, I was scared because I hadn't handled the first pregnancy very well. And the subsequent birth ... well, he totally ignored me throughout. He chose not to even acknowledge the baby that I was carrying this baby which was his and mine!" Eyes glaring, Angie's body was rigid as she spat out: "He was very abusive to me throughout."

The word "abusive," having entered this conversation, was, I noted, returning again and again. I asked her to be more specific about what she meant. "Verbally abusive," she replied. I asked her for an example, and she turned to Bob. "Oh, he just . . . ?" But nothing came, at that moment, to her mind. She gazed at him as if prompting him to help her.

"I can't really remember," he said, mildly.

"I guess I've blocked it out," Angie said, sounding somewhat deflated. There was a long pause, broken at last by Bob. "I don't know if all of that stems back to the fact that we were trying to have a second child, for about a year, and she wasn't getting pregnant. So we had made up our minds that we'd just have the one child, and that was going to be it - period. And then all of a sudden she found herself pregnant, and it really did a number on both of us. And I think that carried over into the pregnancy ... maybe." He sounded doubtful. "Maybe," he added dutifully, "I didn't acknowledge it like I should." He was rushing forward to take the blame and be the bad boy. When she, in other words, failed to handle his self-reproach for him, he could do the work by himself.

His rescue had, however, now restored his wife's momentum, and she was able to take over the conversation again. "This really all goes much further back, to when we first got married, and I wasn't allowed to have my mother and father over." Angie

sounded victimized and aggrieved. I looked at her in surprise, and she assured me that what she'd said was true. "He wouldn't let them come; it was all very strange!

You see, he had-".

"I've mellowed, believe it," Bob intervened to assure me.

"Oh, he's mellowed," his wife agreed. There was a moment of friendly silence.

"But the anger and rage, I never got rid of it," Angie broke that silence to say.

"She's right, you know," put in her husband. "But now

I've mellowed in certain areas, and I have to work on ..."

The sentence trailed off into a shrug.

I turned to Angie. Had she not, I asked her, noticed any of Bob's dictatorial tendencies during the three-and-a-half years during which she and Bob had courted and become engaged?

Martyr or Tyrant

Yes, Angie replied; she certainly had. "But I didn't know any better," she explained. "My mom was abused. I didn't know, at that time-" She mashed out her cigarette in the ashtray. "I have a tremendous amount of self-hatred, and I never felt worthy of being treated any differently. I never thought that I-that anyone would want to treat me good. I never thought of myself as deserving it. So it was okay; he didn't beat me, and he didn't drink, and he didn't cheat-so that made him a marvelous person! And I just accepted this abuse," she added, tears springing to her eyes.

She was, it seemed to me, using "abuse" where "bossy" would have been the more appropriate word.

"I mean, I would get into his car," Angie continued, "and if I got a crumb of dirt on the floor of the car he would go berserk. I was not allowed to drink tea or hot cocoa or anything in that car-his idiosyncrasies were so strange! He used to spit-shine his shoes, and if you accidentally-I mean accidentally- hit his shoes, he would go absolutely crazy. And then, when we got married, I wasn't allowed to have my sister, friends, my mother or father come visit; that wasn't allowed. When I had my children, he wouldn't allow my mom to come and help me!" The tears were now running unabashedly down her face.

"Why was that so, Bob?" I asked him.

"You have to understand her mother," he said. "I mean, believe me I love her," he added hastily, "and think she's a good woman. But ..." He left the sentence there.

"She's overprotective," admitted Angie, smiling wanly, as she wiped the tears from her cheeks with her fingers.

There was a moment of calm and resolution, as if a musical movement had just ended, but a new one (the same one) would clearly begin very soon again. An "abused child," Angie Dinelli, had married an obsessive, overly controlling-in her mind, "abusive"-man. But now, fourteen-and-a-half years later, which one of them was the abuser and which one the abused, which of them the martyr and which the tyrant of the pair?

The Hysterical Marriage

No connubial relationship is, I think, more celebrated in the clinical literature than is that of the remote, unavailable husband and his desperately frustrated, perhaps frankly depressed wife. Should either partner in such a marriage seek psychiatric attention, the male partner is very likely to be diagnosed as an "obsessive-compulsive" and the female as suffering from a "hysterical personality disorder."

Actually, the label of the latter complaint has recently been altered (although the content of the diagnosis remains pretty much unchanged). It is now known as "histrionic personality disorder," because the word "hysteria" (which means "of the womb" or "suffering in the womb") was recognized as having a somewhat sexist ring; it implied that this disturbance was earmarked "for females only." The ancient Greek physicians did indeed believe that the symptoms of hysteria were caused by a woman's uterus having come loose from its moorings and gone meandering off throughout her bodily frame.

In the most recent version of the standard psychiatric reference book, it is nevertheless stated that histrionic personality disorder "can be viewed as behavior that is a caricature of femininity" whether it happens to manifest itself in a woman or a man. The histrionic person is "superficially warm and charming," but also "egocentric, self-indulgent, and inconsiderate of others." She or he is, moreover, "dependent, helpless, constantly seeking reassurance" and may be given to indulgence in frequent "flights into romantic fantasy." She is a love addict, in need of a continual supply of affectionate attention. (Let me say, at once, that although this person sounds like a negative feminine stereotype, I have interviewed a number of couples in which the emotive, self-dramatizing partner is the husband and the relatively detached, more rigid and controlling person is the wife.)

The Love Addict's Mate

The histrionic individual has poor impulse control and tends to say and do things which might more wisely have been left undone or unsaid. The partner is, however, her polar opposite- overly orderly, somewhat inflexible, and often lacking in any spontaneity whatsoever. He is always apprehensive lest something unexpected happen, and his anxious sense of mastery over himself and his environment be endangered. While she is sick for love, he has very little to give her; the more she craves affection, the more she threatens to overwhelm him.

In an article entitled "The Hysterical Marriage," Dr. Jurg Willi notes that the mate of the "hysterical" woman is himself most usually "unremarkable, taciturn ... shy, and almost overly well-adapted or respectful. In contrast to his often extravagant wife, he is pedestrian, pale but sturdy, the 'good guy' type."

The "hysterophile" man, as Willi calls the male who is attracted to the emotionally expansive, attention-seeking female, is frequently someone who is quiet, introverted, and somewhat insecure with members of the opposite sex. "In contrast to

their wives, most husbands of hysterical women rarely dated because they feared rejection," he writes.

These men, he notes, seem to adopt a submissive attitude toward women; their own exhibitionistic and aggressive tendencies are so strongly suppressed that they themselves are not aware of their existence. They cannot, in other words, allow themselves to be aware of their own resentful and angry feelings; such feelings, if they had them, would be profoundly dangerous and destructive. To experience one's own hostility could lead to harm, either to the self or to someone close and important. All anger (and much healthy assertiveness) has, therefore, been purged from the marketplace of consciousness to a dark storehouse where that which is "uncivilized" is kept.

The mate of the histrionic woman would, as Willi comments, "like to see himself as a totally unique and absolutely incomparable creature who stands above and beyond all normal requirements." His wife's responsibility, in the relationship, is to express all of the emotionality that exists in the two of them (and to bear the guilt and the responsibility when her hostility and aggression have gotten beyond her control). He stands aloof, uniquely without feeling and may deplore her overly emotional, somewhat exhibitionistic displays.

The Knight-Rescuer

The story of their marriage, very frequently, begins with the rescue of an unhappy maiden—from her miserable home life or from a disastrous involvement with a difficult, rejecting (but exciting) lover or boyfriend. The wife tends to need the man she marries, in some way, and this lends him a sense of great importance; he wears her ribbon on his visor. He is the knight in her service, not fully loved for himself perhaps, but willing and ready to save her. The mission that he undertakes is that of assuming responsibility for her existence and providing her with stability and security. He vows to be her good parent, in short.

Content with their marital bargain, the couple may live quite happily for a period of time. But eventually the husband, who has suppressed his own dependent, vulnerable feelings—satisfying them vicariously by giving his spouse the devoted maternal caring that he himself actually desires begins to feel more and more depleted. He wants to placate his needful partner and meet her never-ending demands, but he experiences himself as running short of his own emotional provender and not really having that much of a surplus that he can spare.

After a while, having warmed himself initially at the fires of his beloved's expressivity and emotionality ("She was attractive and vibrant," Bob Carrano had begun to recount happily), the husband finds himself unable to provide her with the constant validation and feedback that she so desperately requires. Although he denies his own needs for attention and affection, he actually wants and needs some of the emotional goodies and supplies for himself. But he cannot ask for anything, often cannot "know"

about his own dependent needs and his own wish to be the center of attention- the loved child, who is admired and cared for.

The Collapse of the Arrangement

One thing that he is aware of, and has always known, is that he can be self-contained and can meet his own, very modest emotional requirements. He can take care of his rather limited needs, handily enough, if only he can be rid of the incessant burden of having to deal with hers. The symbiotic fusion, in which she was the good, needful child and he the perfect, boundlessly caretaking parent, gives way when, inevitably, he pulls back and creates some distance between them in order to give some nurturance and attention to himself.

His behavior is experienced, by his uncertain and needful spouse, as an awful narcissistic blow and an almost unbearable disappointment. Her profound sense of herself as an unlovable, thoroughly ineffective person has rendered her an emotional hemophiliac; she needs a stream of self-esteem enhancing affirmation from outside herself, on a fairly regular basis. And although each affectional infusion that she receives suffices for a period of time, she soon experiences the same need for validation, the same terrible craving for assurances just as strongly again. Her partner, having promised to be an unstinting and reliable provider, has now inexplicably refused to continue in his cherishing, caretaking function. She feels dismissed, ignored-as she has felt so many times previously in her life.

The Terror of Emptiness

"Hysterical patients," writes psychiatrist Anthony Storr in *The Art of Psychotherapy*, "are defeated persons. They do not consider themselves capable of competing with others on equal terms. More especially, they feel themselves to be disregarded, and, as children, were often disregarded in reality." For such a person it is clearly true that the opposite of love is not hate but indifference.

The histrionic wife cannot tolerate her mate's turning away and is hypersensitive to any signs of his withdrawal. She is deeply convinced that she doesn't quite exist, when she is alone, and fears being by herself and facing her own terrifying emptiness. In the beginning of the relationship what had been promised to her (or so she believed) was that her mate would always be there for her and provide her with admiration and attention. He would replace her own low self-opinion with his inflated estimates of her beauty intelligence and value. She would receive from him the unstinting parental love which she had never been accorded before.

When, however, her spouse reneges on his part of their marital bargain, she experiences it as a terrible violation. He, who was accepted into her service because he had promised to care for her tenderly and without qualification, has instead reopened a badly healed old sore. Is it possible that he, like those others whom she had wanted to love and be loved by and who had so disregarded her rightful needs-doesn't actually care

that much about her well-being? She turns upon the betrayer the full high-speed spray hose blast of her lifelong fury and resentment.

Struggling for Control

The mate, who had once so reveled in his expressive wife's open emotionality, now desires nothing more than that he find some way to shut off the flow at its source. He, who rarely or never experiences anger, is appalled by the depth of his spouse's; he is appalled, too, by the vicious, almost unbelievable cruelty of the things that she says. Her wild overstatements are viewed as disordered, "crazy," too devastating to merit his forgiveness ever. His reaction is to withdraw even further-and she then pursues him with her stream of endless woes, complaints and accusations.

Each partner in the marriage sees the other as behaving in a painfully rejecting fashion. He, who had committed himself to be there, for her, has remained with her physically but is emotionally absent. Unable to stanch her suffering, he attempts to placate her while actually keeping himself as uninvolved as possible.

She, who had once been the lady in distress, has now become the ogre to be skirted and avoided. He tries to fend off, as well as he can, her laments and grievances about her life, his behavior, their children, their relatives, her lost opportunities, and so forth. But even when he does consent to hear her out, he does so with little or no empathy; what she says rarely penetrates the self-protective armor that he wears. They are in an interactive cycle in which the more she emotes, the less he listens; and the less he listens, the more strident and emotive she becomes.

She struggles to take charge of him and of the relationship, to turn it into the marriage that she yearns for-one in which both partners are "perennially and completely intimate and always emotionally expressive (especially around the subject of her own ongoing difficulties). He struggles just as hard, but in the opposite direction: to control her behavior and the entire relationship in such a way as to ensure the preservation of his own personal space and his autonomy. If he did permit himself to really listen to her, he fears, he could get swallowed up in her uncontrolled and uncontrollable affect. What he fears is not only her emotionality but his own.

The Wild Beast Within

"Obsessional personalities, for a variety of personal reasons, have an especially strong propensity toward control both of themselves and of the environment," remarks Anthony Storr in the book mentioned above. "For them, as for the child who fears the dark, both the external world and the inner world of their own minds are places of danger. Only perpetual vigilance and unrelenting discipline can ensure that neither get out of hand."

Such individuals, as Dr. Storr observes, live in fear of an unspecified yet imminent disaster: the emergence of a barely controlled yet wild beast that is straining at

the leash within. This beast is, he suggests, "principally an aggressive animal. . . ." Often the most compliant, outwardly pleasant seeming people, obsessives are sitting on tinderboxes of unacknowledged, unprocessed; unimaginable (to themselves) rage. Like ventriloquists, they often communicate that anger only through the medium of their more expressive, "histrionic" mates.

He has trouble feeling his feelings; he may never perceive that he is having feelings at all. She cannot not feel; she can experience her emotions, all too well, but doesn't have any idea about how to limit or control them. Between them, in fact, they contain the qualities that one might expect to find in a single healthily functioning individual-i.e., the ability to perceive and experience emotionality and the ability to set reasonable limits upon emotionality in order to keep it within bounds and relatively manageable.

Obsessional Solutions

The obsessional person, although he has chosen a radically different form of psychological defense from his histrionic partner, has suffered from difficulties that are similar in kind. He, too, has been badly nurtured and has had problems getting his legitimate developmental needs duly recognized and met. In his earliest adaptation, his way of dealing with the parents was to become unusually attuned and highly sensitive to what they (or a particular one of them) were feeling. He developed methods of placating the parental authorities who may have "parentified" him by demanding that he care for and comfort one or both of them-but avoided facing up to them directly or expressing his rage at never having gotten his own growing needs attended to.

Full of suppressed resentment himself, the obsessive fears confronting the resentment of others. In adult life, as Anthony Storr observes, such individuals tend to "be authoritarian ... or else unduly submissive.... Faced with possible hostility, one either conquers or submits. In neither case can one achieve equality and respect." Such a person can relate to someone else in an superior-to-inferior mode or in an inferior- to-superior mode, but has great difficulty relating to another individual on the same level of power and authority. This need for hierarchy makes the formation of an intimate relationship with a cherished peer an impossible, if not unthinkable, dream.

The obsessional person, disconnected from his own negative thoughts and feelings, usually finds it difficult to deal with those situations which do elicit his anger and which are inevitable in everybody's life. Frequently, rather than experience and become aware of his own hostile emotions, he will alter his inner reality-that is, act upon his own mental processes rather than upon the real challenge which has come to him from the environment.

He may, for instance, deal with the disturbing situation by pretending to himself that whatever upset him is actually unimportant (and therefore requires no reaction). Or he may question his own manner of looking at the incident so strenuously and meticulously that it becomes impossible to deal with it in a direct fashion. It is as if when someone had stepped on his toe, he were unable to respond with a straightforward "Get

off!" but instead pondered the legitimacy of the other person's being there (even though he himself was suffering in the meanwhile).

Still another method for handling his anger might be that of massively repressing it-failing to process the disturbing occurrence and thrusting it out of his conscious awareness completely. He might then react as if nothing whatsoever had happened; this, of course, would preclude his making the appropriately assertive or angry response which might bring him some recompense or satisfaction. This head-in-the-sand strategy, like the other ones, is a device for stifling the obsessional person's own recognition of the intensely rageful feelings against which he is so anxiously defended.

The underlying assumption he is working with seems to be that if certain thoughts are avoided, the painful emotions associated with them will miraculously disappear. But alas, trying to control emotion by exerting control over one's cognitive processes doesn't really result in the bad feelings going away. Anger, like nuclear waste, is nondegradable. Unprocessed and therefore undischarged, it simply remains where it is-but the threat of its emergence is constant.

The Collusion

Even though he may have no conscious awareness of his own enraged state of feeling, the obsessive perceives the existence within of an obscure, vaguely dangerous force-something disturbing, fighting for recognition and expression. His way of finding some partial resolution of his problem is to release some of that anger through the conduit of his wife's emotionality. By seeing all the hostility, distress, and the like as it exists in her (and identifying with her expressions of the denied, prohibited feelings), he can at least make some connection with that aspect of his humanity which he has so completely discarded.

She, in turn, having repudiated and disavowed her own needs for mastery, self-control, limit setting, and the like, allows him to take over the experiencing and expression of these aspects of human functioning on her behalf. She is, then, all emotion and intuition; he behaves as if the logical, rational, cognitive parts of himself were the only inner reality. While she has no control, he has nothing but control; each seems, in away, to have brought to the other a dowry which is a missing segment of his or her personality.

Mix together what she lacks and what he is deficient in and the blended compound contains exactly what each of them entered into the relationship needing: access to emotionality and the ability to set reasonable limits upon it. The pair ought to live happily ever after ... or so the observer would imagine.

Polarizing

Two individuals cannot, however, merge into one single, undifferentiated being and remain in that state of fusion indefinitely. The two people may feel extraordinarily

close, at first, and their needs may fit together like the interlocking pieces of a puzzle. But inevitably, in the course of time, that initial sense of relief-at having found the very person who makes it possible to establish contact with unacknowledged, repudiated and thoroughly unintegrated aspects of one's own personality-gives way to a feeling of alarm. There is a sense of not only fitting together but of actually being glued there.

The bower of contentment, when the exit doors appear to have closed, starts feeling very like a small, claustrophobic cell. The need for personal space, not provided for in the initial merger, inevitably asserts itself as a reaction to the twosome's state of symbiotic fusion. In an effort to assert their individual separateness and distinctness, the mates begin to exaggerate those attributes and qualities that set them off and differentiate them from one another. Each moves in the direction of becoming as much unlike the partner as he or she possibly can-in technical terms, they polarize.

The rift between them yawns ever wider as she becomes more attention-seeking, childish and theatrical and he becomes increasingly withdrawn, unavailable and isolated. Soon enough he begins to criticize, in her, the expressions of open feeling (especially angry feelings) which he had once criticized severely in himself-so severely, in fact, that he had repudiated and disavowed them completely.

She, in turn, criticizes in him the independent strivings and the self-sufficiency which in her view make intimacy impossible- her underlying reason for having disowned such needs and wishes and cast them out of her internal world entirely. What had, once upon a time, been unacceptable within the self is now what is so intolerable and unacceptable in the partner. The war within each member of the couple has now been transformed into the war that is going on between them. And each believes that peace and harmony could be achieved if only the other one would change.

Becalmed

Angie and Bob Carrano, in that phase of the marital cycle called "productivity and parenting," were not experiencing the second wind of commitment to the relationship that is usual during this period; they were, instead, feeling becalmed upon a timeless expanse. Nothing beckoned, changed or stirred upon their marital horizon-what stretched before them, in the future, looked as flat, motionless and dissatisfying as that which lay behind. It was as if they were marooned, together, in mid-voyage.

Their ongoing exchange of projections, the unconscious yet very real foundation upon which the Carranos' relationship was based, kept both partners in touch with a past from which neither had ever been emancipated; the pair of them were at a standstill. It was as if each had thrown down an anchor, one linking him or her to the original family, and the ropes of those two anchors had become entangled.

As a result, Angie carried-for her husband-the emotionality which he had felt forced to discard very early in his own lifetime. For Bob's mother had been abandoned and then divorced by his father when her small son was just three years old, and Bob, her

only child, had assumed (as the children of divorce so frequently do) the burden of guilt and the responsibility for his grieving, somewhat depressed parent's welfare. He had, throughout the subsequent years of his growing up, manfully suppressed his own emotional needs in order to care for and nurture the caretaker who should have been caring for him.

Similarly Bob, as his part of the marital bargain, carried for Angie-the logic, rationality and ability to set reasonable limits upon emotional displays that had been absent from a stormy household in which her parents constantly engaged in verbal assaults and sometimes even wild physical battles.

In order to raise anchor on the relationship -to move forward, not only in the marriage they shared, but in their own individual development-the underwater lines that connected the two partners would have to be patiently unbraided. For only if their mutual projections were teased apart and disentangled would Bob be able to make conscious contact with his own split-off emotionality and Angie get in touch with her own rational, limit-setting capacities. As things stood, the rules by which their emotional system operated would not permit this to happen-and it was the rules themselves that needed changing if their life together was ever to be different or better.