Our relationships profoundly shape the filter through which we see ourselves.

In the movie *Enough Said*, Eva, the main character, takes us through the frustrating journey of wearing self-protective armor in finding a love that makes us feel safe, secure and joyful.

This is a journey I am all too familiar with. Like Eva, I’ve had my fair share of heartbreaks. They ranged from a three-year girlfriend who had my college teammate in her bed while she was Skyping me, to a girlfriend that told me my needs in our relationship were invalid and my problem.

Towards the end of the movie, Eva finds herself in a tangled mess tied together with the yarn of hidden secrets as she attempts to knit her way out of an uncomfortable confrontation. In this pivotal moment, Eva finds herself standing in front of Albert, the man she loves. She also stands next to his ex-wife, who has bonded with Eva over all of the terrible things she doesn’t like about Albert.

I could feel Eva’s bottled confusion as she tries to explain to both the man she loves and her new best friend the secrets she has held from them.

I’ve found myself in similar positions, where I’ve held the truth or lied about something to protect myself from potential rejection. Only to have the pain come cascading down the mountain of secrets like an avalanche.

Shortly after, Eva finds herself in Albert’s kitchen, apologizing about her poor choices. She is forced to expose her hidden secrets which explain why Eva’s harsh criticism over the past few weeks has torn her relationship with Albert apart.
Albert says something that made my stomach flip. “What about us? What about protecting us?” My stomach cringed when Eva admits the truth.

The type of question that makes you second-guess everything you’ve ever hidden.

After college, I got into a relationship that made me feel incredibly insecure. I felt incredibly anxious and needy, despite trying to follow all of the self-help dating advice on how to be more “manly.” I felt inferior to her. I had a perception that who I was as a human being was not good enough to be loved.

This internal story was a protective shield I created after my college sweetheart cheated on me, despite making me promise her that I was 100% committed to our relationship.

My next relationship formed with a girl who was really close to her ex-boyfriend, as well as an Avoidant. I wanted to be with her, but I felt so insecure and anxious when we weren’t near each other.

My theories of her cheating, among other things, consumed the city of my thoughts like a never ending hurricane.

Rather than trying to understand the psychological and emotional warfare going on inside myself, I attempted to fill my needs with work. My body suffered under 100-hour workweeks. Eventually my body cracked as the toxic emotional patterns flooded to the surface of my skin in the form of Psoriasis. 312 red spots were created, and they took over two years (and counting) to heal.

During my health battle I was forced to look back on my life experiences - in particular, my relationships. I started studying attachment theory, biases, and beliefs to uncover the root causes of my insecurities.
I learned that people are only as needy as their unmet needs. But as Eva reminded me in the movie, oftentimes our needs go unmet; not because of our partner, but because of our expectations of our relationships.

Like Eva, I used my past experiences as a filter to pick my future relationships. I learned to disconnect from my emotions to get by. Eventually I was carrying a 500-lb backpack of emotional baggage that I would bring into my next relationship.

As I slowly unpacked my baggage, my relationships would turn sour. Despite yearning for connection, my theories based on past relationships created disconnection. My unwillingness to expose my truth, just like Eva, caused more harm in my relationships than the protection the lies and secrets offered me.

Our culture is historically ruled by male values, and it has always favored invulnerability. For generations we have selected male heroes who have no vulnerable flesh: Robocop, Superman, and The Terminators just scratch the surface. As I battled the cultural narrative that a man shouldn’t be needy, I accepted the belief that my need for connection was illegitimate.

A lot of cultural beliefs that teach us that our needs are invalid in relationships are merely protective shields against vulnerability. The vulnerability required to have the healthy and fulfilling relationship that I seek.

At the end of the movie, I couldn’t help but be overcome with the value of faith in relationships. That despite preconceived notions that invulnerability was the key to protecting the castle of my heart; I could give the key to my heart to a new person and truly have the love I’ve always wanted.
Eva reminded me of what all of my self-work and therapy has taught me over the years: that despite wanting to close off, the best thing I can do is open up and put faith in myself and my relationship. Because no matter what happens, I can survive, heal, and find the type of love that will make me feel secure, safe and joyful.

And that’s what matters.

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