

Evolutionize Your Life: Michael Dowd and Connie Barlow

Week 3

Connie Barlow: Welcome to session three of Evolutionize Your Life. This is Connie Barlow.

Michael Dowd: And Michael Dowd.

CB: The topic for this week is social instincts, our old mammalian brain's longing for bonding, status, and play.

MD: We'd like to begin with a quote from one of our dear friends and colleagues, David Sloan Wilson. David is one of the world's leading evolutionary biologists and evolutionists in general. He's also working a lot with human cultures and neighborhoods now, and this is one of my favorite quotes from his acclaimed book, *Evolution for Everyone*.

David says, "The most extraordinary fact about public awareness of evolution is not that 50 percent don't believe it, but that nearly 100 percent haven't connected it to anything of importance in their lives. The reason we believe so firmly in the physical sciences is not because they are better documented than evolution, but because they're so essential to our everyday lives. We can't build bridges, drive cars, or fly airplanes without them. In my opinion, evolutionary theory will prove just as essential to our welfare, and we will wonder in retrospect how we lived in ignorance for so long."

CB: Amen. This week, one of the topics we're going to be exploring with respect to our social instincts is going to have enormous practical consequences I'm sure for more than a few of us in this course. That topic is sexual infidelity within marriage and within other long-term loving partnerships, gay or straight. An evolutionary perspective offers an opportunity not for you to change whatever your moral precepts may be about the importance of fidelity in committed

partnerships, but rather for ramping up your ability to feel compassion about events and situations that may still be festering in your heart, weighing down memories that may still burden you or your loved ones with blame, shame, anger, or resentment. Added to that, what you may find as a result is just what Michael and I have found, and that's that an understanding of our evolutionary heritage with respect to our social instincts can call forth compassion, and it can do that with almost no effort on our part. It just comes naturally once you start seeing through an evolutionary lens.

MD: And that's a key point, that it's not working to feel compassion, not trying to feel generous or compassion. It's the kind of generosity and compassion, as we spoke about last week, that comes through knowledge. It's related to the kind of appreciation and honoring that can only come through knowledge.

CB: So, once you start seeing our evolved social instincts through an evolutionary lens, you too may discover that even beyond compassion, another spiritual virtue emerges on its own and then begins to rearrange your memories and the way you see and respond to the present, and the possibilities for your future. That spiritual virtue is forgiveness of self and of others. So, let's buckle our seatbelts, it's going to be quite a ride. Let's get started.

MD: So, our intent here in session three is to learn about and appreciate the old mammalian brain and it's deep emotionally charged social instincts, and then by doing so, to take on a new evolutionary perspective for better understanding and managing our personal and societal challenges in relating to one another.

CB: Now, the societal part we'll just barely begin to touch on here. It will be in week five that we come back to our social instincts and see how when we look outward to our culture beyond our communities, what the possibilities are for improvement, for transformation thanks to this evolutionary understanding.

MD: Just to quickly review what we discussed last week in terms of our physical instincts, our reptilian brain's for safety, sustenance, and sex, there we discussed the big challenges that are evoked in modern times because of urges that are deep within us, the most ancient part of our brain, and where of course the supernormal stimuli that pull on our instincts for food, feel-good substances, and sexual titillation or release.

CB: As we move week by week through the evolutionary history of our quadrune brain -- that is, our four-parted brain -- we find that the newer section of our brain, the brain that came into being in our mammal ancestry, cannot be discussed without also bringing in the older section as well. It's like building a house. You lay the foundation first, the cement is poured, but as you build and equip your house, you will be bounded by both the limitations of that foundation and the opportunities that occur to you later. For example, you may discover that really, the place where you want to put that washing machine and dryer is down in the basement. You may also discover that if you happen to be living somewhere where tornadoes come seasonally, you may be very grateful for that basement the next time you hear a tornado siren.

We'll hear too in this session about our old mammalian brain. We'll be seeing that the reptilian brain may offer us some good, practical support for certain challenges, primarily depression, arising from our social mammalian nature. And of course, that old lustful reptilian brain can also present our mammalian brain with enormous challenges, and that will be our focus.

MD: We're going to assume that you've already watched my Evolutionize Your Life video, the 30-minute piece in the resources from last week, and if you haven't please do that soon. To use some of the playful language that we introduced there, we really can't survey the opportunities and the challenges of the furry little mammal part of our brain -- that is the old mammalian limbic system -- without revisiting our lizard legacy. And in ways, our lizard legacy is like an enormous, dangerous crocodile lurking unseen just beneath the surface of a lake or murky river in Africa.

The crocodile in our brain is poised and ready to lunge and drag down underwater our own gentle gazelle or intensely social wildebeest.

CB: Here's a little science background that's so important for getting the understanding of how the conditions changed from our reptilian past to when our first mammalian ancestors evolved that brought forth the emotional brain, the social instincts, and the bonded attachment we now have with children, kin, friends, with humans everywhere. Something about it, what is it that distinguishes mammals from reptiles? There's a number of things, but I think something that all of us recognize is this -- reptiles like snakes and turtles and pythons and crocodiles, they all lay eggs. And with very few exceptions -- pythons and crocodiles being the exceptions -- the reptilian females lay their eggs, and then it's over. They just walk away, and they let the sun or the heat of the sand do its job, and the young hatch, and they are on their own from the get-go. There's no such thing as parenting in almost all of the reptiles.

With mammals, by definition, parenting must happen in the females, and that's because mammals have mammary glands, and the mammary glands produce milk, and it's the milk that nurtures the young as soon as they're born. So at least the females in our early ancestry developed that emotional bonding with their babies, and then through time that emotional bonding ramped up into bonding in social communities, and then in more pair-bonded species that bonding ramped into what we consider romantic attraction and deep partnered long-term relationships. That's all part of our mammalian past.

Now, one of the resources we're going to be featuring this week and urging you to go to are a couple Ted talks and some other resources by the biological anthropologist Helen Fisher, and Helen Fisher has written a lot of books from an evolutionary perspective of what love is all about. And one of the main things she does is distinguish love into at least three fundamental types that map onto different parts of our brain.

MD: And these are radically different aspects of what gets called love, gets lumped together with one English word love. But these are three very different experiences and feeling states, and different parts of the brain are engaged in each.

CB: And hormones, too. The first one she calls outright lust. We discussed that last week. It's the reptilian brain. That's the urge for copulation, for release. That's where internet porn comes from. It's all involving that part of the brain. You do not make love with a prostitute. It's lust, it's sex, that's the part of the brain involved. Now this week, we're going to be talking about two other forms of love. The next one is a combination of the reptilian brain's urge for physical consummation, but it's first brought into play with the mammalian brain's concern for focusing on a single individual, and that's what Helen Fisher calls romantic attraction. Once the romantic attraction is allowed to develop and grow, the fires diminish, but then a new kind of fire comes on. She calls that attachment, or bonded attachment. And one of the funny things is -- she has a way with words -- Helen Fisher says about romantic attraction, she says, "Romantic love is one of the most addictive substances on earth." And anyone who's been in love and can't think about anything else when that's going on, and then is in the depths of depression and can't eat and can't sleep, can't find pleasure in a sunset or their favorite music anymore, that is the same thing as an addiction. In fact, Helen Fisher says that when one loses that high of romantic attraction, it is no less of a withdrawal problem than coming off of heroin. It involves the same hormone, dopamine.

MD: So, while we're on the topic of romantic love and bonded attachment, we want to introduce a new bonus session that we didn't announce prior to the start of the course. This is from Christopher Ryan. He's coauthor with his wife Cacilda Jetha of the *New York Times* bestselling book *Sex at Dawn*, which is all the rage these days in the field of evolutionary psychology. I personally think it's the best book on evolutionary psychology that's been written in a decade.

CB: And as you'll hear in this clip, I started reading his book *Sex at Dawn* predisposed to disagree with it, and I ended up doing a complete turnaround as a result of all the lines of evidence he and his wife put together. Now, the only thing that you need to know prior to listening to this particular clip is that, keep in mind that there's a big distinction that happened in our human ancestry between the millions of years that we lived in small bands as foragers -- that is, we didn't plant trees, we didn't plant grains, but we kept moving with the seasons and with the game, and we lived in small bands. But once agriculture took hold in different parts of the world, foragers were forced out of those fertile valleys, and they were relegated to the deserts, anywhere. They could not fight against the agriculturalists, but there was a great cost that came with settling down into farms where you pass the property through to your heirs, where you had to protect your legacy, where you had to protect your farmlands, but where you were living stationary in much larger aggregations than our social instincts honed over millions of years were prepared to deal with adequately.

MD: Most people have never thought about it like this, but for 95 percent of human existence, we live as tribal hunter-gatherers. We migrated with the seasons, we didn't stay put, we just moved on. We kept moving in small groups. There were no possessions and this sort of thing. And the radical shift that happened 10,000 or 11,000 years ago to agriculture changed almost everything, and our instincts have not had time to catch up. Talk about mismatched instincts, this is a classic example of that.

CB: So, here's the clip with Christopher Ryan, coauthor of *Sex at Dawn*.

[Begin clip of Christopher Ryan interview]

Christopher Ryan: Well, as you say, there are very disparate groups of people who are involved in evolutionary psychology, so it's a dangerous endeavor to try to speak for all of them,

but I would say that probably the unifying idea is simply that much as the body is designed by evolutionary force that have enacted on us over hundreds of thousands or millions of years, the brain also is a result of these forces, and so to a large extent our behavior is shaped by the experiences of our ancestors. Now of course the debate is how much of our behavior is shaped by those experiences, so evolutionary psychologists try to find what they call human universals, which is something that is shared by everyone everywhere, and that points us toward these evolved behaviors as opposed to culturally imposed or local, family imposed, or even personal free will type decisions. So, I would say that's the underlying theoretical construct, that the brain is a result of evolutionary forces, and then we go from there.

CB: So Chris, you have a blog on the Huffington Post, and before this conversation, Michael and I went in and sampled your blogs, and they're so timely that we'd like to start for our listeners here, recite a few paragraphs from two of those blogs to help people get why your book is foundational in evolutionary psychologist, why people like *[unintelligible]* want to have this out and be thought about, and yet why it is also so threatening to the people who have staked their careers on what you call the standard narrative in evolutionary psychology. So, I'll start off with a paragraph that comes from your blog post, "Five Things an Affair may not Mean," that you posted don August 2010 on the Huffington Post.

You wrote, "In *Sex at Dawn: The Prehistoric Origins of Modern Sexuality*, Cacilda Jetha, my coauthor and wife and I argue that there's a good reason long-term sexual monogamy is hard for human beings. The evidence we present in the book shows that "til death do us part may be a wonderful ideal, but it's anything but an easy or natural path for most human beings. Yes, we are moral beings, most of us, with a capacity to override our evolved predispositions to some extent, but maybe, just maybe, an occasional slip on that long and arduous path is to be expected."

MD: The second passage that we wanted to read here at the beginning came from your blog post titled "Sexual Evolution and the War Between the Sexes." You say, "People, most of whom haven't bothered to read our book, assume that we're advocating open marriages and rampant, promiscuous rutting in the streets. We're not. It's true that we argue the evidence overwhelmingly indicates that no creature on earth spends as much time fussing over sex as homo sapiens, and our turbo-charged libido was key to our evolutionary success as a species. When you look at the available evidence, it's clear that human beings' bodies, minds, and sexual habits all reflect a rather immodest prehistory. But as we say in our books, even we are unsure what to do with this information, other than write it down and spread the news. If we advocate anything to our readers, it would be a harm reduction approach to infidelity in place of the just say no response responsible for a huge amount of needless suffering. Because of the type of creature we are, nonmonogamous tendencies will always be within us. Whether and how we act on these tendencies is another matter. A deeper, more informed understanding of where these feelings come from can only help us in choosing an appropriate response to them. Our greatest ambition is to provoke conversations that will lead people to clarify their understanding of their own sexual nature before they sign on to long-term commitments they can't change later without making a mess of their lives."

CR: What you've pointed out there, what you're highlighting, is one of the most important messages in the book, that so many people think, not having read it, just hearing about it, or maybe reading a review somewhere, they think the book's a diatribe against monogamy, but it isn't at all, no more than a book talking about how our ancestors ate meat would be a diatribe against vegetarianism. We're not arguing that there's anything inherently wrong with monogamy, we're simply saying that like vegetarianism, because it runs directly against the sort of evolved currents in our nature, it's going to be a challenge, it's going to be difficult, and you should approach it as something that's going to be a challenge and maybe incorporate a good helping

of compassion into the endeavor, because if any slipup is going to be considered a complete failure, then you're not going to make it for very long.

One of the metaphors I use in presentations a lot is to say that like vegetarianism, monogamy is a challenge, and just because you've chosen to be a vegetarian doesn't mean that bacon's going to stop smelling good.

MD: That's a great analogy.

CB: A great analogy. I actually started reading your book predisposed to disagree with it. As a woman who wants to be in a monogamous marriage, and who is right now in a monogamous marriage, having a partner who was not strictly monogamous at one point in my life was very hurtful for me. And I've come to a point, thanks to an understanding of our evolutionary heritage, where I can understand how that can happen, and so it did not force a breakup in our marriage. But nonetheless, it's not something that I want to know, and I put it in the same frame as I put in the frame of the fact that I have type-2 diabetes in my Hungarian maternal ancestry famine-prone side of my family, and it's something I'd rather not have there. I'd rather not have to struggle with making sure in my own diet that I don't follow the path of my ancestors, but it sure does help to know why it was adaptive in the past for my Hungarian ancestors to have the kind of metabolisms where boy, can they put on weight whenever food's available, and when food is available, they say yes, and they ate it, because famines regularly came. They would not keep that overweight on.

MD: And harsh winters.

CB: And harsh winters. And so having that evolutionary understanding is really the only way I'm willing to accept rather than make wrong the fact that I do have to live my life with a challenge. And I think that what you're doing for particularly let's say women in my set, who maybe in a past relationship had troubles either with themselves or a partner and are now trying

to live in let's say a completely monogamous relationship, it sure opens us up to be more honest about what we're willing to say to our partner as to where the challenges are, and what we can hear, whether or not those challenges are acted on. And I'd like to thank you for making that -- helping me go further down that path of commitment to openness and honesty and willingness to hear that the universe is not exactly the way I would've wished it were.

CR: Well, thank you. I'm sorry it was such a harsh message.

MD: Actually it reminds me, a dear friend of mine we actually both have known for years, Brad Blanton, who wrote a book called *Radical Honesty: How to Transform Your Life by Telling the Truth*, one of my favorite quotes, a paraphrase, is, "Whether you're monogamous or not monogamous is not the primary thing that determines the quality of your relationship. Whether you're honest or not is."

CR: Exactly, that's the key right there.

MD: And that's where I've found and continue to find your book to be so great, and why I'm recommending it to everybody, because in our experience, in helping people to understand the challenges of living with mismatched instincts -- that is, where we have millions of years of programming to be a certain way, to think a certain way, to feel a certain way, to act a certain way, and yet if we feel and act and think and do in those ways indiscriminately in a modern or postmodern world, we can cause some real problems, simply understanding that so we can have lightness, gratitude for the fact that if our ancestors didn't have the very same instincts we can sometimes find challenging, we wouldn't even be alive. So, starting with gratitude that can only come from knowledge, from understanding, having that gratitude, and it does follow in my experience with exactly what you just said in terms of compassion for oneself and others. And in my experience, those two things make it much easier to, for example in my current relationship with Connie, monogamy's the only thing that works, and yet I find it effortless to live in

monogamy with Connie. And the biggest piece is because I don't judge myself for having these thoughts and feelings. It's like you said, of course I'm going to find bacon attractive, the smell, but that doesn't mean I always have to gorge on it, or even have it at all, if I'm a committed vegetarian.

CR: Yeah, and I think expecting it to be a challenge makes the challenge easier to deal with. You don't get ambushed by it.

CB: Excellent. Well, Chris, let's give people a little substance here, and also your book is just full of evidence. I as a science writer am always looking not just for statements but evidence, and your book is packed with evidence. So, tell us what the standard narrative, before your book was published, before you entered this public conversation and academic conversation about evolutionary psychology, what was the standard narrative?

CR: The standard narrative goes back to Darwin's sense that males are the driving force in sexual interaction, and that females are essentially passive participants in procreation. Nothing perplexed Darwin so much as the brightly-colored, swollen -- I think he called them the hind ends -- of certain primates. So, he's talking about sexual swellings there on female chimpanzees and bonobos and other primates. They perplexed him because he couldn't understand why females would advertise their ovulation, and thereby provoke males, because he thought that the males would always naturally be sexually aggressive, and that the females would be sitting back and letting the males fight it out for these mating opportunities. So, the standard narrative relates pretty directly to Darwin's Victorian sense of human sexuality. It's primarily the notion that females have always traded fidelity, and therefore paternity certainty, for resources from the males -- whether it be meat or status or protection or shelter, so on. So, it's essentially a suburban vision of human evolution where the woman stays home with the kids and the man goes out and brings home the bacon -- there's bacon again.

So, that's the standard narration. In the book, we refer to something we call Flintstonization, which is this sense of people projecting contemporary morality and life patterns into prehistory as a way of explaining and also justifying the present creating a fictionalized distant past. So, that's the standard narrative, that females are not particularly interested in sex -- female humans, anyway -- and that they trade sexual opportunity for resources, protection, and so on from males. That's why one of the funny little lines we have in the book is that Darwin says your mother's a whore, because all women trade sex for stuff, and that's essentially prostitution.

MD: Interesting. So Chris, could you share a little bit about where you and your wife depart from the standard narrative? Where do you see a different paradigm at work, and why?

CR: Cacilda and I argue that women are every bit as libidinous and sexual as men are, albeit in different ways, and then there's a great range of experience in both sexes. But the idea that women aren't interested in sex and just lie back and think of England doesn't hold up when you look at the data. So, what we tried to do in *Sex at Dawn* is marshal all these different lines of inquiry to show how outdated and inaccurate that view of human sexuality is. We look at the sexual experience of the primates closest to humans, and we look at anthropological evidence. Perhaps most importantly, we look at human sexual anatomy, what that indicates about our ancestors' sexual behavior.

CB: That was absolutely essential evidence for me as a science writer to be able to move from my predisposition again to hold with the standard narrative -- that is, women are coy, we have so much more to lose when we get pregnant, we've got a nine month pregnancy, we have a dangerous birth, we have to nurse the baby, and then it's going to take in the old days 16 years or so to raise a kid. Now, we're lucky if we get them out by 30.

MD: By 30.

CB: And it's a major commitment, and there's no doubt that this kid is yours. And yet part of the standard narrative in evolutionary psychology from the male side is that in theory, like Genghis Khan, you could have thousands of kids. Before there was paternity testing available, no one could prove that you were the father, and so you might be able to get your genes into the next generation with 15 minutes of effort. In contrast, if you did have a wife and put your resources in, and college education and all that, really concerned about making sure that these were your genes -- I think what I'm saying is that the standard narrative that women are more coy and more careful about who they get pregnant by and who they copulate with -- or at least their parents are more concerned about that -- certainly made sense with modern sense with modern society and how much investment goes into children. And so, I'd like to say that the evidence that you presented on the physical of the human body compared with the other primates, stuff that I'd heard before but I'd never put it together in the way you did, was very convincing to me. So, if you could say a little bit about that just to give our listeners a taste -- and then of course they'll have to go and get your book, or as we did, we got it on audio from Audible.com, and we listened to it. But, tell us a little bit about the physical evidence that you find so compelling that the standard narrative of female coy and male screwing around wherever he gets a chance to but the female not, tell us what you found.

CR: Well, first of all, the way you described the underlying truths of the standard narrative is very accurate and compelling, and it's interesting because so much of it's about economics. You're talking about how much it costs to raise kids, and how long it takes, and college and this and that, and that's all true, and it's true on a biological level, as well. So, it's always been true that it's been riskier for women to have a child than for the man to copulate for two minutes, certainly. Nine months of pregnancy doesn't compare to a few seconds of sex. And so, that's true. But, what's not accurate is this sense that humans evolved in nuclear families where the woman would've been dependent upon a man for her resources, for her essential safety and

protection and nourishment. What we find when we look at the anthropological record is that hunter-gatherer people live in small bands in which resources are shared. And so, the women wouldn't have been dependent on individual men to get the things they need. So, that's an important caveat, that we're not arguing that women aren't by nature more cautious in terms of who they're going to have sex with. We're simply saying that that caution would have been channeled in different ways than is being supposed by the standard narrative.

[End clip of interview]

CB: Our conversation with Chris then moved on to some of the specifics of an ongoing problem that we've had here in the United States that results in the fall of many of our political leaders.

MD: Including the recent ones in the news, Anthony Weiner and John Edwards. It seems like every few weeks or every few months there's another sex scandal in the news.

CB: So, after we talked about the public political consequences of mismatched instincts for lust and romantic attraction with the cultural norms we now have in the western world, and especially with our public officials, we turned to the more practical benefits for the rest of us -- those of us who aren't politicians and celebrities -- but how might this understanding of our instincts for lust, romantic attraction, and deep long-term bonded attachment, how might this evolutionary lens offer us practical benefits in our lives?

MD: So, here's another much shorter clip with Chris Ryan.

[Resume clip of Christopher Ryan interview]

CB: A lot of us have in our personal lives, in the lives of our relatives, our friends, we do have this problem with "infidelity" or dishonesty or hypocrisy or discovering lies, all these kinds of things that can cause serious problems in a long-term bonded attachment relationship, whether it be married or not. What kind of response have you gotten -- your book's been out for about a year now -- have you gotten from the public about whether this perspective has helped their lives?

CR: We've gotten literally hundreds of amazing emails from readers. I can't begin to tell you all the different responses we've gotten, but it's really blown our minds. And neither Cacilda nor I have any experience as public people until this book came out, and frankly, we weren't really even expecting it then. But, thanks to Dan Savage and others, word went out pretty quickly, and things started happening, and the emails started coming in. And some of them still bring tears to my eye when I think of them now. I remember one, for example, a woman -- it was very succinct and short -- she said, "I'm a 63 year old widow. This is the most important book I've ever read. I wish I could read my life over."

MD: Oh, my God.

CB: Whoa.

CR: Incredible. We've gotten a lot of emails from people, as I mentioned earlier, both men and women, who've essentially said thank you for showing me that I'm not crazy, that the things I feel and experience are not perverse and sinful and horrible, they're just part of human nature. Yeah, amazing. And then some of the most touching ones -- like just yesterday, I got an email from someone who said, "The definition of awkward is to be a conservative Christian minister who agrees with everything I read in your book. Now I don't know what to do." Or, there was a sex therapist who wrote a review of the book, and this is a guy who's in his 60s, I think. He's been not only a sex therapist, he teaches sexuality at a university, and in his review, he said,

"I've been teaching human sexuality for 25 years, and I have to go back and rethink everything I've been saying and thinking in light of this."

To me, that's the essence of intellectual integrity, someone who's willing and has the courage and the fortitude to be able to reassess his assumptions after having relied on them and reinforced them in his own mind and taught them to students for so many years. I can't tell you how moving it is for us to receive, to read things like that. It's just fantastic.

CB: We actually just over the last couple weeks have been aware of someone who read your book, and it ended up saving her marriage, because she and her husband both read and discussed it. Have you gotten any emails from either men or women who talk about how it's saved their marriage or renewed their attachment to one another, anything about the partnership bond itself versus the expression of human sexuality?

CR: Yeah, that's one of the most universal themes that we've gotten, and emails from people who said, "I read this book and gave it to my husband, and it's completely changed our relationship and it's enabled us to have conversations that we never would've had otherwise, and thank you for saving our marriage." Yeah, we've gotten a lot of those sort of emails.

MD: I'll bet. One of the things I felt as I read it is that it was validating things that I've held in my mind, heart, and believed since the mid-'80s, but it allowed for those understandings to be grounded in such a wide array of evidence. And the paradox in my experience is that being able to completely honest, heartfelt, transparent conversations and relationships -- I was a minister for 10 years, where I performed weddings and I pastored several churches, and that sort of thing. And one of the pieces of advice I always gave young people in my coaching them before I would marry them was along the lines of the Brad Blanton quote I gave earlier, that the primary thing that determines the quality of your relationship is how honest you are with each other, and that if you're keeping any secrets whatsoever, it's much easier to then keep another lie, but if

you are truly transparent and naked, as it were, before the other, where there's nothing that you've done or thought or felt in your past that you'd be ashamed that this person knows, and that they in fact do know that, then it becomes actually quite easy to stay in integrity once you are in integrity, and I found that this understanding that you've articulated, the two of you articulated in your book so well, I've been on both sides of the equation. My first marriage, we were married for 13 years. The first half of the relationship was monogamous, the second half of the relationship as nonmonogamous or polyamorous, but it was completely honesty with each other about it, and this understanding that you've articulated allowed us to divorce and remain close friends and are close friends to this day.

And yet in my relationship with Connie, the same knowledge, the same lightness about my own instincts, my own understandings, my own proclivities, my own nature has allowed it to be pretty effortlessly monogamous. So, both those who choose monogamy, given the unique constellation or makeup of the relationship, and those who choose nonmonogamy, if that's something that they're led or able to or in an economic situation where it's not threatening to do that, both of those are profoundly enhanced in my experience -- and the experience of many others I've coached or counseled over the years -- from being at peace with our nature and then having honest conversations in light of that.

CR: Definitely, I agree with you. The basis of any relationship has to be candor, otherwise you're just talking to yourself.

[End clip of interview]

CB: Michael and I got an email directly from someone who had prospered in just this way from reading *Sex at Dawn*, and we actually asked her if we could record the conversation, and she said sure, in part, because she's been very forthright and open about it in her blog on

Psychology Today Online. Her name is Rachel Clark, and if you want to see her blog on this very topic, just Google "Rachel Clark Psychology Today," and you'll get there.

MD: Rachel's a science writer.

CB: We talked with her for over an hour, but the gist of what happened is after about 10 years of marriage, with two sons still in elementary school, a romantic attraction happened to her that she was authentic about with her husband, but it carried on and carried on, and eventually they got a divorce, and then he had a romantic attraction. They came back together, they reconciled, and even though *Sex at Dawn* was not the reason they reconciled -- they actually reconciled about a year and a half before the book came out -- she got a review copy in early from Chris Ryan himself, and when she and her husband read that book, a whole new way of understanding what had happened to them came forth, and they worked through it. And now they feel their bond is stronger, and their commitment, their bonded attachment to one another is even deeper and has more prospects for success.

MD: It's a great example, as we've experienced as well that understanding our nature just makes it so much easier to live in integrity.

CB: So, here's Rachel Clark.

[Begin clip of Rachel Clark interview]

Rachel Clark: Sam and I didn't find *Sex at Dawn* until a good while after we had reconciled. Our experience of reconciliation was not informed by *Sex at Dawn* at all. And then when we found it, it was like, oh. There was such a powerful shifting of our understanding of what had happened to us that it kind of tuned things upside-down for us for a little while, because it was so different than what we had integrated into our understanding based on the literature that we had found while we were reconciling. Sam and I have many friends who are in the process of divorce or

have been divorced, and for all very similar reasons to the reasons we got divorced, and people don't get back together again. I see that as a tragedy in many ways, not just for them but for their families, and there's so many reasons why it's very hard to go through a divorce, and to have that happen to children and to the extended families and the communities.

So, just really quickly, what happened with the reconciliation was, we tapped into this whole body of literature about affairs and about biological attachment. And I don't want to gloss over this, but I don't want to spend a lot of time on it -- I spent a year at least, maybe a year and a half, really angry that the thing had happened. I was disgusted, I was angry at Joe, I was angry at Kate, I was mostly angry at myself, I was angry at Sam, I was angry at everybody. Once we reconciled, once we got back together and things were secure and settled again, all this stuff came out. And in hindsight -- and I've said this a few times, but I can tell you this now -- that incredible anger and those negative feelings, there's part of me that really thinks that it's probably biological, and that it came from having violated the bond and all that stuff, and that Sam and I almost lost each other. But, the affair literature creates a series of stories in your head that loving another person is wrong at a fundamental core level. And it's very clear, the whole linguistics around affairs, and the whole semantics around affairs, it's set up to imply that there's something wrong with loving another person, and to have feelings. And so, I was angry. And a lot of that, I really think a lot of that came from having seeped ourselves in this literature. And so, I was blaming other people, I was blaming myself, I was angry. And again, I take responsibility for my choices and my own response, but then I started, I got connected with Psychology Today, I was invited to blog there, I started reading some stuff on the home page, and I came across Chris Ryan. And I went, well, that's different.

And the book was just about to come out, and I wrote him and said who I was and gave him the thumbnail of our story and I said, I really want to read your book. And because I was a science writer, he basically suggested that he send me a review copy. And so I read this book, and of

course I couldn't put it down. You know, you can't -- it's so funny, it's so well-written, it's covering all the bases. My science writing person was like, my God, this book's amazing, because it's so comprehensive, and it's what you said, Michael, all those lines of evidence from so many different directions. I'm like, I'm in the room with a genius, it was just compelling. And then to come to it from our background, from the place that I was in, was so incredibly transformative. And I emailed Chris the other day, and I said, I couldn't even have gotten to a place to talk to you about this before now, because it took me a year to integrate it. It took that long. It was so upending.

And the short story was that I read the book and I started talking to my husband immediately about it, and he read most of the book, and he had the same experience. What happened was, all this anger, all this rage, all this stuff started to drain away. It just melted. And one of my first responses was, I want to send this book to Joe, I want Joe to read this book. And he did, and I did, and as a result of reading *Sex at Dawn*, Sam and I essentially reclaimed friendships with Joe and Kate, because we had created these very special relationships with these two folks, and because we read *Sex at Dawn* and we saw all this evidence, it was like we knew it. It was like, you couldn't have gone through what we went through and not experienced on a visceral level the truth of what that book says. And when I read it, it was like, oh, that's natural. Oh my gosh, it's natural. And when I started to get that, I couldn't be angry at Kate anymore. It was like, of course that happened, she's human, my husband's human, I'm human, Joe's human. And not only are we human, but actually we evolved to be highly socially sexual, and we've been ignoring that as a society and in the institution of marriage for a really long time.

And when I started to realize that, then I suddenly had this very gentle response to what had happened, and kind of humor, like my gosh, no wonder all that stuff happened, and thank God Sam and I found our way back together again, because so many people don't, and they create these beautiful long-term attachment bonds, and then they fall in love with someone else, or

they have this attraction response to someone else, and then all hell breaks loose because we live in this culture where that's not supposed to happen, but it happens every day. And so then, what do you do with that? And so what Sam and I have done with it is, we are really gentle with ourselves about what happened, we've become even closer than we were just through the reconciliation, because it's kind of a powerful thing to talk about realizing that it was a natural experience to have that deep feeling for another human being besides your spouse. It's very connecting for us.

CB: Now, where have you come to for the remainder of your marriage together, however long you may live? Are you expecting to have another intense romantic attraction somewhere outside and go through it in a different way? I mean, what do you expect?

RC: That's a really good question. We are not even close to looking for anything like that. We are really excited about being monogamous and being in our marriage, and at the same time, because we're so much more informed than we were, if something like that were to happen in the future, neither one of us would be surprised, and there would be far more humor and understanding and acceptance. But, the core commitment is here, and we really are very clear about that being the case. And we talk about these things on occasion -- we don't spend our lives talking about it, because we're living our lives and really excited to do that finally. This kind of took over our life for three or four years, and it was a huge drain. I'd like to have a garden, you know. This can be very exhausting.

[End clip of interview]

CB: So, that was Rachel Clark. Turning now to a brief overview of the resources for this session, there is of course the audio, the full-length audio with Christopher Ryan. There's also an audio of our own story that we're recommending. It was an audio that we recorded in the autumn of 2009, when Governor Sanford of South Carolina and his wife, Jenny Sanford, were

much in the news. And we title it Evolution and Infidelity. And for those of you who are curious about Michael's and my own intense interest in this topic of evolution and infidelity and why we've been interested in it for many years, you'll hear what our personal story has been, and how an evolutionary perspective has really worked with us.

As with the previous two sessions, you're again going to find a rather rich webpage that I have created with links to the important video, audio, and text resources for this week's topic. Among them, you're going to find right at the top Helen Fisher -- again, she's the biological anthropologist -- and you're going to find several videos, two Ted talks of hers, plus some important text. You're also going to find some resources, if you're interested in finding out about what's going on with the younger generations, something that my boomer generation never really experienced, but it's the hook-up culture which is now pervasive not only on college campuses but reaching down into high school, and there's something for women called Hook-Up Depression. So, you can learn about that, and what evolution has to say about why that would happen.

MD: You'll also see three stories related to the rise in testosterone that occurs in all men, and many women as well, when status rises, and that's related to sex drive and flirting and that sort of thing, as well as a number of blog posts that I've written on this topic of infidelity and relationships and the challenges that have happened with political leaders and sports leaders and religious leaders. CB: And we've even got something here that will warm the hearts of anyone who owns a pet -- that is, a mammal pet. If you own an iguana, it's not going to apply to you, but if you own a cat or a dog or a horse or a rat, you'll be right in there.

MD: And those of you that don't own a pet, when you read that you may reconsider.

CB: On the main webpage for session three, you're going to find some links, including a Ted talk, about the absolute necessity of play for mammals, and about the unique human ability and necessity to keep that play going on all the way through our adulthood.

MD: And I've got to say that I watched that Ted talk on play just the other day, and it was transformative. I have been thinking differently around play for adults, in a radically different way, in a very fresh, exciting way, as a result of that Ted talk. I highly recommend it.

CB: And when I watched it, I quickly inventoried how I have play in my life now and went, thank goodness Michael and I have three little pet songs that we playfully sing to ourselves most every day.

MD: We've got a lot of play in our lives, and that's one of the reasons why I think our lives are so rich and joyous, that there's so much play.

CB: We're also delighted to be able to give you some links to how this evolutionary perspective about our emotional brain, our social instincts, this need for bonding and nurturing and physical touch, what the implications are for infant care. And I was delighted to be able to include on that webpage a picture that I took just last fall, and it's a rather extraordinary picture about Grandpa Mike with his firstborn grandchild there wrapped on his chest.

MD: Yeah, Ida Renee.

CB: Finally, there's a lot of resources about how an evolutionary perspective can help us understand depression, beginning with how to appreciate it, why we inherited this capacity to fall into depression, how might it have served our ancestors -- and here's where the reptilian brain, the lizard legacy comes in -- for ways that it can help us move through depression.

MD: So, as we've shared in the audio of the first two sessions, if you are taking this course just out of a sort of intellectual curiosity, then listening to this call every week, listening to the

Q&As, that may be enough for you. But if you really want to make a difference in your life, if your life isn't a nine or 10 on a scale of 10 in terms of the quality of your life and relationships, and you'd like to grow in a more healthy, positive direction, I really want to emphasize that it's not going to happen unless you do the exercises. You really have to take the time to do the exercises, to experience the real fruit of this transformational process.

So, there's four exercises this week. The first is just called soliciting feedback. There's few things more powerful and empowering to other people as well as giving people the permission and inviting them to be authentic with you in terms of how they would rate the quality of their relationship to you, and if it's less than a 10, what would it take to make it a 10.

The second exercise is just a little, short process that produces magic every single time. In any relationship where there used to be closeness, there used to be affinity, there used to be love, and now there's not for whatever reason, there's something you can do that will always produce magic. I've never seen it fail. And it's basically to do the opposite of what we habitually or instinctually do, which is if we're close to somebody and then there's a breakdown or breakup or souring of the relationship for whatever reason, what we do instinctually is blame them for everything that doesn't work or didn't work in the relationship, we take credit for everything that did or does work in the relationship, and of course they're doing the same thing, so it's not a surprise that there's estrangement. Well, if you want magic to occur in any relationship, you do the opposite of that, which is you give the other person credit for everything that did or does work in the relationship, you take full responsibility for everything that didn't or doesn't work in the relationship, and then just shut up. And almost always, tears, reconciliation is the result. I can't recommend that too highly.

Now, I need to say, if there's only one exercise that you get and really apply and a habit that you develop as a result of this course, please make it the third exercise in this week, the heart-to-

heart process. There's nothing that Connie and I have used that has been more helpful on a regular basis in our marriage to keep us at a 10 on a scale of 10 than this heart-to-heart process by our dear friend Paul and Lane Cartwright [*phonetic*]. They're generously offering a significant discount to folks, and you can get just their audiobook or their full coaching program, but I cannot recommend too highly this offering on the heart-to-heart process.

And then finally, the fourth exercise is related to meaningful songs and rituals. Again, it comes back to play, and finding ways of having goofiness, having play, having laughter, having touch in our lives is the most nourishing thing we can do on an ongoing basis, beyond having some kind of heart-to-heart process where we can actually hear each other and move through conflict because we actually get each other. But beyond that, having play and lightness and little rituals, little games in your relationship is phenomenal.

And finally, before I move off talking about the exercises, lest anyone think that I had forgotten our initial promise on the webpage for this course that one of the things that I would be talking about is the one practice vital for maintaining a fabulous sex life even if you have the same partner and a monogamous relationship for decades. It's basically transparency, it's honesty, and giving your spouse, giving your partner not just the opportunity, but making sure that they never have to carry any resentment, that you've created a safe space for them to be authentic about whatever criticisms, complains, judgments, assessments, any complaint that they have of you, if you can give them the safe space to be authentic about that -- and that's what this heart-to-heart process does in spaces -- that's the key piece, because it's unexpressed resentment, unexpressed judgment, unexpressed fear that deadens romantic intimacy, deadens sexual intimacy. And so that again is what this heart-to-heart process is all about, but it's being able to be authentic yourself, but even more importantly providing a safe space for your partner to be authentic, so that they never have to carry any judgment or complaint. And I promise that if you do that, when you do that, as you develop the habit of doing that, your intimacy will continue to

grow, no matter how long you're together, even if you're together for decades. And it's not just the bonded, attachment type intimacy, you can also have a hot, wonderful sex life, because that's the key thing that kills it, is unexpressed resentment and anger and frustration. Nothing's more important in any relationship than providing the safe space to hear each other, to get each other, and that's the genius of this heart-to-heart process, and why we recommend it so highly.

CB: So, for session three, our social instincts, what can go wrong, and as with everything in evolutionary psychology, people fear that someone's going to say, it's in my genes, just use it as an excuse. Well, that's not what we're about.

MD: And it's also not been our experience. I don't know personally of anyone who's really gained an understanding of their evolved instincts, whether it's their physical or social or their interpretive or cocreative instincts, I don't know of anybody that's then used that as an excuse for irresponsible or out of integrity behavior. Now, maybe there's some psychopaths or sociopaths out there that do that, I don't know, I just don't know them, but the vast majority of people don't do that. We become naturally more compassionate, naturally more understanding, and naturally more committed to being in deepest integrity, and that's the gift of understanding our instincts.

CB: Now, I do want to mention something else in the what can go wrong category. Now, this isn't anything that can go wrong in learning about our evolutionary psychology, it's actually something that goes wrong when our brains malfunction, and this is something that we social liberals in particular need to take in. It's a real gift from the evolutionary brain sciences. And that is that the social instincts, bonding, attachment, all that kind of good stuff, that requires an intact, old mammalian brain. If someone has brain damage -- either they're born that way or because of childhood abuse, if they lack the basic capacity for empathy, deep problems can ensue. So on the resources page, you'll also find links to a new book by Simon Baron-Cohen. It's called

The Science of Evil: On Empathy and the Origins of Cruelty. It's about borderline personality disorder, autism, narcissism, psychosis, Asperger's. All of these syndromes have one thing in common, lack of empathy. In some cases, this absence can be dangerous, but in others it can simply mean a different way of seeing the world. That book was transformative for me. Again, one of the things we're emphasizing here is not just compassion, but compassion within safe boundaries, and that particularly applies to the fact that there are people with brain damage, and psychopathic forms of brain damage, around us.

So, one of the things I'm going to be linking to in addition to the book is a review that I posted on Amazon, and I'd like to read just two paragraphs from that as food for thought here. "Although it may be frightening for some of us social liberals to make the shift, we must face that science is now telling us that for empathy-impaired youth and adults, no amount of correctional intervention may be able to help the brain restructure itself into a more normal neuropathway. Coming to terms with the existence of this profound limitation in what nurture and reeducation can actually achieve can nonetheless foster a vital blend of two values in those of us who do have empathy. The values are compassion and safe boundaries, and the two are absolutely linked. Amazingly, the more I learn about what can go wrong with the empathy circuit in the human brain, whether the cause is genetic, prenatal condition in the womb, or postnatal harmful nurturance, the more compassion I have even for the most hardened criminals. Can any of us imagine any condition worse than having so faulty an empathy system that we intentionally and uncaringly harm others? Can any of us imagine a situation more appalling for a mother than to watch her adolescent son grow into a psychopath no matter what intervention she may seek out and provide? And yet it happens. And that is where this growing body of scientific knowledge can also help us see the vital importance of growing safe personal and collective -- that is, societal -- boundaries in tandem with our compassion."

MD: Now, what can go right when we really take this perspective to heart, when we integrate it into our lives? Well here are the outcomes that we imagine, that we've experienced and that we hope for you. The first, ascent. I accept that I and others have deep ancestral instincts to bond, and to bond in different ways, with kin, friends, romantic partners, mates, and our offspring. I accept that the joys of love can only be experienced in tandem with the hurts caused by human imperfections, and the mismatch between the instincts we inherit and the cultural conditions into which we're born.

CB: Appreciation. I'm grateful for my social instincts. I'm immensely grateful for the opportunity to love.

MD: Honor. I honor social instincts in myself and others by distinguishing the various forms of love, notably the reptilian urge for copulation from the mammalian instincts for nurturing and for bonded attachment. I honor the gift of love by accepting the risk of suffering and loss.

CB: Witness. I'm increasingly able to notice and distinguish the urges within me for lust, romantic attraction, and bonded attachment. I do not make those urges wrong, yet I know I am responsible for my actions.

MD: Compassion within safe boundaries. I have compassion for myself and others, and I know the importance of safe boundaries.

CB: Joy. I joyfully exercise my mammalian instinct to play, and my human instinct to maintain playfulness as an important part of my adult life.

MD: Amen. Societal benefit. I look for opportunities to apply my evolutionary perspective in ways that can spark and expand compassion and healthy forms of forgiveness in myself and in others who seek my listening or my counsel.

So, that's it for our introduction to session three. You'll get the rest in the resources and in the exercises.

CB: So, signing off, this is Connie Barlow.

MD: And Michael Dowd.