

mindset

BOOK DIGEST

RELATIONSHIPS: MINDSET IN LOVE (OR NOT)

FOCUS ON ROMANTIC PARTNERS: A fixed mindset in relationships leads us to feel judged and permanently labeled by rejection. We must be unlovable...

Without the recipe to heal our wounds, we resort to dreaming of revenge. On the other end, the growth mindset drives us toward curiosity, a will to understand what happened, to forgive and move on. Relationships are seen as a learning experience.

There's little agreement upon reliable ways to measure social ability. This is one of the reasons why we rarely acknowledge people who make a happy marriage last as brilliant relationship makers. As a society, we tend to forget that relationship skills...are SKILLS.

The fixed mindset makes us believe that our qualities are fixed, we therefore have three choices when we want to apply it to relationships. We can believe that our qualities are fixed, that our partner's qualities are fixed or that our relationship qualities are fixed. With a growth mindset we can acknowledge that all three can be developed.

The fixed mindset leads us to believe in magical love, where everything is solved automatically because we love each other! This means that if the relationship is the right one, there shouldn't be any work involved. That it should be easy to understand and honor each other's needs. Only the growth mindset can help us see that those things take effort and the will to work together through inevitable differences.

The author then quotes a renowned psychiatrist called Aaron Beck:

*“One of the most destructive beliefs for a relationship is
“if we need to work at it, there's something seriously wrong with our relationship.”*

As Carol Dweck puts it:

“This belief (...) robs people from the very thing they need to make their relationship thrive”.

Fixed minded people believe their partners should be able to read their mind. And that a couple should share all of each other's views on...everything. Especially on their view of the relationship! Even the smallest discrepancies can threaten their belief that the relationship can last.

“Mind reading instead of communicating inevitably backfires”

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The fixed mindset can trick us into believing that our partner agrees with each person's rights and duties without ever having spoken about it. And it's a slippery slope, because as Carol Dweck reminds us:

"Few things can make partners more furious than having their rights violated. And (...) than having the other feel entitled to something you don't think is coming to them."

"It takes work to communicate accurately and it takes work to expose and resolve conflicting hopes and beliefs. It doesn't mean there is no "happily ever after", but it's more like "they worked happily ever after".

In a fixed mindset, we believe that **problems betray deep-seated character flaws**. It makes us forget that there is no great relationship without some conflicts and problems included and so here goes the mind **assigning blame** to a character trait. Which in turn makes us feel **anger** and **disgust** towards our partners... **Not the recipe for success**. It drives us to be contemptuous towards our partner and dissatisfied with the relationship. It's a vicious cycle. Two options are left: to leave OR to turn a blind eye and to denial, every time something goes wrong (which then prevents us from getting a chance to fix it).

"Relationship expert Daniel Wile says that choosing a partner is choosing a set of problems. There are no problem-free candidates. The trick is to acknowledge each other's limitations, and build from there."

The growth mindset allows us to switch from throwing angry labels to choosing helpful actions.

A word of caution from Carol Dweck though:

"The belief that partners have the potential for change should not be confused with the belief that the partner WILL change. The partner has to want to change, commit to change, and take concrete actions toward change."

The fixed mindset guides us to oscillate between seeing our partner as the love of our life or as our adversary. And someone always has to take the blame if (when!) something goes wrong. That means it's either us or them. So it has to be them. And there can be no forgiveness! Because if you're actually decent, then I'm bad... Or so does the fixed mindset say.

We can be in the same situation **with our parents**: if they didn't love you, were they bad parents or are you unlovable? The fixed mindset denies any other option.

Only the growth mindset can allow us to **rise above blame** and face the problem TOGETHER.

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The fixed mindset can also lead us to **compete** with our partner. Someone has to be the winner, since someone has to be the loser. The growth mindset saves us by showing us that the goal of a relationship is to allow both partners to grow by supporting each other as the relationship deepens. People are on the **same side!** There's no competition, only a will to grow. Growth minded partners empower each other to reach their own goals and fulfill their own potential.

FOCUS ON FRIENDSHIP: As Carol Dweck reminds us and “despite the dangers of praising traits”, sometimes we need reassurance about ourselves... and **friends** can do just that. They can be a wonderful source of **wisdom** and **courage** and allow us to pursue **growth enhancing challenges**. If they have a growth mindset! Fixed minded friends, especially if they're at a time where they feel the need to prove themselves—which as we've now come to understand is **OFTEN**—tend to make us feel diminished...they have to! If not that might mean they're inferior to you. So the author asks us a very powerful question to help us evaluate our friends' impact on us:

“WHO CAN YOU TURN TO WHEN GOOD THINGS HAPPEN? (...) WHO WOULD BE GLAD TO HEAR IT?”

“Your failures and misfortunes don't threaten other people's self-esteem.

Ego-wise, it's easy to be sympathetic to someone in need.

It's your assets and your successes that are problems for people who derive their self-esteem from being superior.”

FOCUS ON SHYNESS: A growth mindset is not a cure to shyness, but it sure helps shy people navigate it. Shyness is the worry that others will bring us down, that they will judge us or that we'll be embarrassed in a social situation. It can really hold us back from developing any kind of relationships. However with a growth mindset, we're driven to look at social situations as challenges! And study therefore shows that a growth minded shy person will be able to have thriving relationships, while a fixed minded one will struggle to create any.

FOCUS ON BULLYING: Carol Dweck concludes this chapter on the effect of mindset for people facing bullying. **It's easy to see how the fixed mindset influences the bully.** Bullying is judging. The bully is superior to the bullied who is inferior—for whatever reason the bully could invent. It's important to know that it **can also change the entire impact of the experience on the person who's being bullied.** And the saddest part is that prolonged bullying is the risk factor for anyone to shift from a growth mindset to a fixed one. If I'm being bullied everyday and if no one ever comes to help, that might mean I deserve it... says the persecutor in our head.

This is why it is so important to promote the growth mindset as a feature of schools' culture. We must not judge the bullies, we must show them another way. Praising their efforts. Making them feel seen for who they are and not for who they're superior to (allegedly). By turning children away from judgment and towards compassion and improvement, **we can prevent bullying** from happening in the first place.

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Fixed mindset curse:

“When people believe in fixed traits, they are always in danger of being measured by a failure. It can define them in a permanent way. Smart or talented as they may be, this mindset seems to rob them of their coping resources.”

Growth mindset blessing:

“When people believe their basic qualities can be developed, failures may still hurt, but failures don’t define them. And if abilities can be expanded—if change and growth are possible—then there are still many paths to success.”