



Abstract

Most people desire to have a romantic relationship, and most people desire to have a child. The paper suggests one respect in which it is more desirable to have a child with a romantic partner rather than with someone other than a romantic partner, as platonic parents do. The first premise claims that the romantic relationship, and only this relationship, has a certain desire as a constitutive part. This is the desire to be as related to someone as one can be. That this 'desire for relatedness' is a constitutive part of the romantic relationship explains why those related by a romantic relationship tend to become related in other ways and explains why romantic partners tend to desire to have relationships with those to whom their romantic partner is otherwise related. The second premise is that by having a child together romantic partners become related in an important and unique way, satisfying their desire for relatedness. Since platonic parents do not have the desire for relatedness toward one another they do not satisfy such a desire in having a child together. A brief review of the sociological literature on platonic parenting is included and eight objections are answered.

Keywords

Co-Parenting, Family Ethics, Parenthood, Platonic Parenting, Romantic Love

Introduction

Having a child and having a romantic partner are different relationships. They are both relationships that most people desire to have. Most people desire not just to have both, but to have both together: to have a child with their romantic partner, to be a co-parent with their romantic partner. Let’s call people who do this ‘romantic parents.’ Some people who do not share a romantic relationship (and who never did, and who do not intend to) choose to have a child together, to be co-parents. Let’s call people who do this ‘platonic parents’ (Traverso and Robbins 2018). The occurrence of platonic parenting, but also its rarity, motivates this question: what is it about having a child with a romantic partner that is more desirable than having a child with someone other than a romantic partner? This question concerns the desirability of these options for the individual contemplating a choice between the two (rather than which arrangement, if either, is more desirable from the perspective of a benevolent social planner or social engineer). Plausibly, there are many desirable things about having a co-parent, and many desirable things about having a romantic partner. What is desirable about the coincidence of these relationships, as compared to having both separately? Undoubtedly, there are many highly contingent factors that help determine the desirability of romantic parenting and platonic parenting – the approval or disapproval of your friends and family, how amenable family laws in your country are to platonic parenting (Kim 2012, 56), or the possibility that one arrangement would be better for your child’s welfare (an as-yet little-researched possibility (Imrie and Golombok 2020, 309)). Putting these considerations aside, I will argue for one respect in which romantic parenting is more desirable. The argument is this:

- (1) The desire for relatedness is a constitutive part of the romantic relationship and only the romantic relationship.
- (2) Co-parenting satisfies the desire for relatedness in a unique and important way.
- (3) The desire for relatedness is satisfied in this unique and important way by, and only by, romantic parenting.

The paper begins with a brief review of the sociological literature on platonic parenting to provide some idea of the contexts in which this arrangement has arisen. After explaining what

is meant by the desire for relatedness, I argue for (1) by arguing that it is a good explanation of the phenomena that two classes of desires are typical only of romantic partners:

(a) X desires for many further types of relationships with Y

(b) X desires that Y have relationships with those to whom X is otherwise related, and X desires for relationships with those to whom Y is otherwise related.

I then respond to 8 objections to the argument for (1). I then argue for (2) by noting some features of the co-parental relationship in virtue of which it satisfies the desire for relatedness in an important and unique way. I will not offer analytic definitions of terms such as 'parent,' 'child,' 'romantic,' trusting that readers will be familiar with many prototypes and believing that my usage does not depart from common usage.

Platonic parenting in practice

Platonic parenting has attracted a small amount of sociological attention. A few studies from Israel focus on the platonic parenting that occurs in the context of the 'hetero-gay family,' consisting of 'a gay man and a heterosexual woman who choose to conceive and raise a child together outside of marriage' (Segal-Engelchin, Erera, and Cwikel 2005, 86). Generally, both the men and the women sought out this arrangement because they desired to have a biological child and because they desired that their child be raised by both a father and a mother (Erera and Segal-Engelchin 2014, 457). Additionally, many of the women cited the need for financial security and the need for someone to share the burdens of parenting with as reasons for choosing this arrangement, rather than becoming single-mothers by choice (Segal-Engelchin, Erera, and Cwikel 2012, 396). Almost all the women did not also have romantic partners, whilst many of the men did (Erera and Segal-Engelchin 2014, 453; Segal-Engelchin, Erera, and Cwikel 2012, 393). The search for a platonic parent was facilitated by a nongovernmental organization, the *Alternative Parenting Center*.

In terms of the attributes sought by the men in their prospective co-parent, 'Several men stressed that the criteria guiding them were different from those used in selecting a romantic partner,' seeking women who were financially independent, who would not expect

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3 'intimacy or couple-ness,' who were 'motherly,' and who would have traits like being
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5 'responsible,' 'stable,' 'well-functioning,' 'productive,' 'having a good head,' 'energetic,' 'can be
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7 counted on in all respects,' 'communicative,' 'friendly,' 'talks well,' and 'interesting.' (Erera and
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9 Segal-Engelchin 2014, 462–64). In terms of the attributes sought by the women in their
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11 prospective co-parents, the main themes were stability, readiness for child rearing, and
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13 manliness (Segal-Engelchin, Erera, and Cwikel 2012, 399). The sexual orientations of each co-
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15 parent were largely incidental to their being chosen by the other, with the mothers citing 'the
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17 difficulty of finding straight men who are willing to commit to coparenting' (Segal-Engelchin,
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19 Erera, and Cwikel 2012, 397) as the main reason for platonically parenting with a gay man. The
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21 platonic parents typically lived in different homes and the child resided primarily with the
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23 mother, though 'both parents are actively involved in their children's daily lives and in child-
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25 related decisions. Furthermore, in most cases, the birth parents negotiate a shared parenthood
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27 agreement before the child's birth, stipulating parental rights and responsibilities' (Erera and
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29 Segal-Engelchin 2014, 451).

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31 Platonic co-parenting arrangements have also been sought out by both heterosexual
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33 men and women. For instance, a survey of users seeking out a platonic co-parent on the UK
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35 based website *Pride Angel* (n=102) found that 38 were heterosexual, with 20 heterosexual men
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37 and 18 heterosexual women (Jadva et al. 2015, 1898). In response to the open-ended question
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39 "'Please describe how you see your relationship with the co-parent'" the most common terms
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41 used related to friendships... other common terms used to describe the relationship were as a
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43 "partnership" or as "equals" (Jadva et al. 2015, 1903). Excluding those who answered 'Not
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45 sure,' most of the men and women wished their co-parent to see the child every day or once a
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47 week, and likewise wished to see the child every day or once a week. Most of the men wished
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49 the child to live between their own home and the co-parent's home equally, and most of the
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51 women wished the child to live at their home all or most of the time (Jadva et al. 2015, 1904).
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53 Another context in which platonic parenting arrangements have arisen is when a lesbian couple
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55 decides to co-parent, as tri-parents, with the sperm donor, or when a gay couple decides to co-
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57 parent, as tri-parents, with the gestator (Herbrand 2018).
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3 'It is impossible to know how many children are conceived each year as a result of
4 [platonic parenting] arrangements' (Harper et al. 2017, 17), in part because home insemination
5 relies on cheap and unregulated technology that requires no expertise. There are several UK
6 and US based websites dedicated in part or in whole to facilitating platonic parenting
7 arrangements (Harper et al. 2017, 14), which claim to have tens of thousands of members
8 (Linton 2020). There are also social support websites such as the 'Co-Parent's UK' Facebook
9 group which has around 1,400 members as of July 2021. With the help of the *Alternative*
10 *Parenting Center*, 300 children had been born to platonic parents in hetero-gay families in Israel
11 as of 2014, though it is estimated 'that the number of children raised in hetero-gay families in
12 Israel is much higher' (Erera and Segal-Engelchin 2014, 452).
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22 **The desire for relatedness is a constitutive part of the romantic relationship and only the** 23 **romantic relationship** 24 25

26 Our relationships relate us to one another. Some types of relationships relate us more closely
27 than do others: the mother-child relationship relates us more closely than the doctor-patient
28 relationship. Some token relationships of the same type relate us more than do others: I am
29 more related to one sister than the other sister – I am 'closer' to one. It is a difficult
30 philosophical enterprise to characterize relationships, or the state of relatedness that they
31 bring us into. Some characterize relationships as being constituted by shared activity (Telfer
32 1971), or as being constituted by the norms that govern them (Phelan 2020), or as being
33 constituted by shared-narratives (Moore and Frederick 2017). We might wish to say that two
34 people are more related when they engage in more relationship-constituting activities, or more
35 important types of such activities, or a greater variety of such activities. Or, we might wish to
36 say that two people are more related when the norms that govern them allow for the more
37 complex forms of cooperation characteristic of a spouse or a parent than the simple norms
38 characteristic of a neighbour, or when the narratives that they share become more important
39 parts of their overall life-narrative.
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53 Whichever of these theories of relationship and relatedness one endorses, if any, the
54 following factors will roughly track how related two people are:
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- the number of types of relationships between the related (e.g., those who are just acquaintances are not as related as those who are acquaintances and second cousins).
- the importance of the types of relationships between the parties (e.g., those who are second cousins are not as related as parent and child).
- the variety of the types of relationships (e.g., someone who is your friend and congregant is perhaps less related to you than someone who is your friend and business partner. The former are similar sorts of relationships whilst the latter are quite different sorts of relationship, which together allow for a richer and more multifaceted set of activities, norms, and narratives).
- how free from impairment the token relationships are (e.g., a parent and child are less closely related if they blame one another for various wrongdoings, if they have clashing personalities, if they live on different continents and so see each other rarely).

The desire for relatedness is the desire to be as related as one can be to someone. This ‘can’ should be understood in a practical modal register rather than the conceptual modal register. So, for instance, it seems conceptually possible that romantic partners can also be business partners (or teacher and student, priest and parishioner, author and editor, chauffeur and passenger, etc.) That most token romantic partners do not desire all these sorts of relationship does not mean that they lack the desire for relatedness. Perhaps becoming business partners might make them less related (or bear a risk of this) by harming their existing relationships – for instance, if the activities and norms and narratives of these types of relationship tend to interfere with those of the more central relationship. Or, such relationships might be beyond the scope of what is practically possible for them and so need not figure as part of the desire for relatedness. Although a pair of romantic lovers who don’t start a business together are perhaps not as related as they can be in a conceptual sense, they may be as related as they can be in a practical sense. My own judgement is that enjoying these types of relationships with a romantic partner is desirable even if not actually desired. To have these types of relationships with my romantic partner, to pursue new activities with them, be governed by new norms with them, and to add new narratives to our overall relationship, seems to hold forth many sources

of value – delightful experiences, beautiful and novel experiences, struggles that shape one's character, mutual self-revelations – and value of types that are hard to avail of in other ways.

The claim that the desire for relatedness is a constitutive part only of the romantic relationship is not the claim that the presence of this desire is a necessary or a sufficient condition for a romantic relationship. Rather, it is the claim that the presence of the desire for relatedness strongly counts toward some token relationship being of the romantic type and that its absence strongly counts against some token relationship being of the romantic type, and it is the claim that the presence of the desire for relatedness will not strongly count towards some token relationship being some other type of relationship, such as a friendship or siblinghood.

A prediction of the claim that the desire for relatedness is a constitutive part only of the romantic relationship is that we will typically find two classes of desires between romantic partners, and find the absence of the same two classes of desires between those who are not romantic partners:

(a) X desires for many further types of relationships with Y

(b) X desires that Y have relationships with those to whom X is otherwise related, and X desires for relationships with those to whom Y is otherwise related.

Both classes of desires are predicted by the claim that the desire for relatedness is a constitutive part of the romantic relationship because they are both ways in which romantic partners multiply the number and variety of relationships that they bear to one another, including important types of relationship, making themselves as related to one another as they can be. The intuitive thought here is that the romantic relationship is not satisfied with mere romancing. Rather, it is characteristic of the romantic relationship for it to bind and entangle its participants in other relationships in a way that is not characteristic of other types of relationship.

(a) X desires for many further types of relationships with Y

Romantic partners typically desire to be friends, sexual partners, co-residents, family-members, spouses, marital-partners, co-parents, co-congregants, co-club-members. One way of gaining evidence for this is to reflect on one's own desires *vis-à-vis* one's own romantic partner (or former romantic partner or imagined romantic partner): does one desire them to also be a friend, sexual partner, co-resident, marital-partner, co-congregant, and so forth? My own answer is 'Yes.' I take this desire as evidence for (a) in the same way that we regularly offer intuitions as evidence for or against philosophical theories or offer judgments of value as evidence for or against axiological theories.

That the desires of romantic partners typically match (a) is also evidenced by the fact that those in romantic relationships very often end up in other types of relationships with one another. The sociological data that would be most salient to showing (a) would be data about the proportion of those in romantic relationships who come to be related in many other ways, as against the proportion of those in romantic relationships who do not but instead continue to be related only by the romantic relationship. The sociological data on this point is incomplete, perhaps because it is so obvious that romantic relationships very often end up being accompanied by these other types of relationships, and perhaps because the various types of relationships we bear to one another are not treated as analytically distinct. We can note that one of the strongest predictors of a change in religious affiliation is marrying someone of a different religious affiliation (Musick and Wilson 1995). Again, we can note the findings that, of married British adults, 27% are married to their 'first love' and 36% are married to their 'second love' (Dahlgreen 2014). I am confident that readers will be able to adduce many anecdotes of romantic partners who moved into the same house together, who joined the same clubs, who ended up going to the same place of worship, and who got married and had children together, whilst they will find relatively few examples of romantic partners who remained just romantic partners.

By contrast, I suggest that those who are not romantic partners typically do not have desires for many further types of relationships with one another. For instance, we do not typically desire that a friend also become our co-resident or our sexual partner. Or again, we do not typically desire that a sibling also become our co-resident or our co-parent.

(b) *X desires that Y have relationships with those to whom X is otherwise related, and X desires for relationships with those to whom Y is otherwise related*

A romantic partner typically desires to have relationships with the friends and family, etc., of their romantic partner, and for their romantic partner to have relationships with their own friends and family. One way of gaining evidence for this is to reflect on one's own desires and practices *vis-à-vis* one's own romantic partner. For instance, one introduces a romantic partner to one's friends, desiring that they will become friends with (or at least friendly with) one's friends. Again, one introduces a romantic partner to one's parents and siblings and aunts and uncles and grandparents, desiring that they will come to have some type of relationship with them. Likewise, one desires to have relationships with those to whom one's romantic partner is otherwise related – to be friends with their friends, to get to know their parents and siblings and so forth. *Vice versa*, one typically discovers the same desires in one's romantic partner – they introduce you to their friends and encourage relationships with their family-members ('You and my grandpa both love stamp collecting! You should ask to see his collection, you might really bond over it!'). Through the satisfaction of these desires, romantic partners come to bear new types of relationship to one another, e.g., 'I am Y's romantic partner, but also friend of her friends, friend or son(in-law) of her parents, friend or brother(in-law) of her siblings, club-member of her grandpa, co-congregant of her co-congregants.'

By contrast, when someone is, say, a sibling we do not typically desire to become friends with their friends, or when someone is a co-resident or a sexual partner we do not typically desire to become acquainted with their family, and so forth.

The desires discussed under (b) also evidence themselves when someone to whom we are otherwise related develops a romantic relationship. For instance, your friend develops a romantic relationship and you find your friend introducing their new romantic partner to you, trying to make a friendship between yourself and their new romantic partner. Likewise, these desires evidence themselves in cases when a romantic relationship breaks-down. When one's own romantic relationship breaks-down, it is often the case that we cease desiring to have relationships with our ex-romantic partner's friends and family, and again when our friend's

romantic relationship breaks-down our friend ceases desiring that we be friends with their ex-romantic partner, and so forth. This shows that these other relationships are to some degree creatures of the relationship between the romantic partners, e.g., the good offices one shows to a mother-in-law, or the friendly demeanour one adopts at a work-party are done for the sake of one's romantic partner.

(a) and (b) well explained by the desire for relatedness

That romantic partners typically experience the classes of desires discussed under (a) and (b) is explained by the claim that a desire for relatedness is a constitutive part of the romantic relationship and only the romantic relationship. Through satisfying the desires of (a) and (b) romantic partners come to have more types, more important types, and more varied types, of relationship with one another, and so become more related to one another, satisfying the desire to be as related as they can be. The explanation exhibits quantitative and qualitative simplicity since it explains the desires in question by postulating a single thing and a thing of the same ontological category. The explanation exhibits unificatory power since it explains a range of otherwise apparently unrelated phenomena. So, the explanation has several theoretical virtues, which provides reason for accepting it.

Objections to (1) asked and answered

(i) 'I'm sceptical of the explanation offered. The desire for relatedness is explained by some other desire that philosophers have suggested as foundational to romantic love, such as the desire for union. So, (1) is not explanatory.'

The claim that B explains C is not undermined by the fact that B is in turn explained by A. So, the claim that the romantic relationship constitutively involves a desire for relatedness that explains (a) and (b) is not undermined by the suggestion that the desire for relatedness is explained in turn by a desire for union that is foundational to romantic love.

However, I suggest that the claim that the desire for relatedness is foundational to romantic love is a promising one as compared with its competitor. Many philosophers have offered 'union views' of the desire that is foundational to romantic love (Helm 2017). Plato's

Aristophanes ascribes to romantic love a desire 'to become parts of the same whole' (Plato 1997, 192d). Roger Scruton ascribes to romantic love a desire for 'union with the other' (Scruton 1986, 89). Arthur and Elaine Aron describe a 'self-expansion model' on which romantic love involves the desire 'to expand the self by including an other in the self' (Aron and Aron 2016, 112). Robert Nozick says that 'romantic love, is wanting to form a we' (Nozick 1991, 418). Most evocatively, Julius Evola contends that in romantic love:

'the being whom we love, we would at the same time like to destroy, to kill, to assimilate, to dissolve within us.... [Yet]... Within the absolute desire to destroy and to absorb is also contained the desire to be destroyed and dissolved' (Evola 1983, 86–87)

A relationship theory of romantic love is at least salutary in that it draws our attention to the way in which romantic love diffuses and communicates itself beyond the romantic pair, to their friends and family and other relations. I note four *prima facie* difficulties with union views of romantic love that a relationship view avoids. For one thing, it is hard to give an account of the intentional object of the desire in question that is not metaphysically obscure – what would it look like for two to have become one, or for me and you to have become a we, or for us to have destroyed and absorbed one another? For another, it is not clear that the desire in question can be satisfied, as some proponents of union views admit (Scruton 1986, 127, 130). For another, it has been objected that the satisfaction of the desire in question would suffer from two ethical defects: it would do away with the individual autonomy of each romantic partner, and eliminate the possibility of unselfish concern between romantic partners 'by doing away with the distinction between my interests and your interests' (Helm 2017). Taking the desire for relatedness as foundational to romantic love avoids all of these difficulties – we have several plausible theories of relationship and so of the intentional object of the desire for relatedness, it seems that the desire can be satisfied (though not easily), and that the satisfaction of the desire would leave the autonomy of each romantic partner intact and would allow for a distinction between the interests of each. For these reasons, plausibly a relationship view of romantic love is a better way of articulating the longing that union views of love try to articulate.

(ii) ‘I’m sceptical of the explanation offered. Why would romantic relationships involve a desire for relatedness? Knowing that would put to rest my suspicion that the postulation of such a desire is metaphysically extravagant.’

From an evolutionary point of view, reproductive partners face ‘the commitment problem.’ It is ‘in each partner’s interest...if a more attractive alternative comes along, to abandon a partner in an established relationship’ (Gonzaga and Haselton 2008, 42). One influential theory of why romantic love evolved is that it helps resolve the commitment problem in various ways – making us blind to attractive alternatives, making us overestimate the qualities of our existing partner, adding immediate and unavoidable costs to partner abandonment such as feelings of guilt (Frank 1988, 193–200).

The desire for relatedness also helps resolve the commitment problem by prompting us to form further ties of relationship with our reproductive partner, between them and one’s own family and friends, and between oneself and their family and friends – multiplying the external monitors against partner abandonment and strengthening the internal monitor. Consistent with this hypothesis are numerous sociological findings:

- *Network approval.* Actual and perceived approval from friends and family for a romantic relationship correlates with the longevity of the relationship (Felmlee 2001) as well as feelings of love, commitment, and positivity between romantic partners (Sinclair et al. 2015).
- *Network overlap.* Romantic partners socializing with friends together and having friends in common correlates with decreased likelihood of dissolution of the romantic relationship (Hogerbrugge, Komter, and Scheepers 2013).
- *Cross-network contact.* Positive relationships between a marital partner and their in-laws correlates with marital satisfaction, commitment, and stability (Bryant, Conger, and Meehan 2001). Frequency of interaction between one’s romantic partner and one’s own friends and family correlates with viewing the romantic partner as a reliable source of support (Cornwell 2012).

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3 So, the hypothesis of a desire for relatedness is not metaphysically extravagant, but rather is
4 one way of elaborating on the evolutionary function of romantic love, and there is sociological
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6 sustain romantic relationships.
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11 ***(iii) ‘You have a good explanation, but there is a better explanation. People have life scripts –***
12 ***“culturally shared expectations about the order and timing of events in a prototypical life***
13 ***course” (Rubin, Berntsen, and Hutston 2009, 54) – and our life scripts happen to involve***
14 ***moving in with a romantic partner, getting married, having children, and introducing them to***
15 ***friends and family (Dunlop et al. 2017).’***
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21 It is not clear that the objector offers an alternative explanation to the one I have given. Rather,
22 we might say that it is part of our life script to have a desire for relatedness to our romantic
23 partners, which in turn explains these other aspects of our life scripts.
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27 The objector might press that it is not a part of our life script to have a desire for
28 relatedness to our romantic partners, it is just part of our life script to have each of the desires
29 described above – so, it becomes unnecessary to postulate an additional desire that explains
30 these desires. In response, I clarify how I understand the metaphysical relation between the
31 desire for relatedness and the desires described under (a) and (b). My understanding is that the
32 desire for relatedness is a whole and its parts are the desires described under (a) and (b). So,
33 even if nobody has ever consciously desired the whole, ‘being as related to Y as I can,’ by having
34 the desires described under (a) and (b) they do desire the former.
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42 This raises the question of in what sense the desire for relatedness is a whole. I answer
43 that we know that we are dealing with a whole of which the desires described under (a) and (b)
44 are, for romantic partners, parts, because the desirability of that putative whole is greater than
45 the sum of the desirability of the putative parts. An analogy is helpful here. If one desires to eat
46 two slices of bread that envelope a slice of cheese, then one desires to eat a sandwich, even if
47 one does not conceptualize the desire in that way. That one desires to eat two slices of bread
48 that envelope a slice of cheese rather than eating one slice of bread, then another slice of
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bread, and then some cheese, is not an accident; it is explained by the fact that the whole is more desirable than the sum of its parts.

The objector seems to assume a different construal of the metaphysical relations here, that the desire for relatedness stands in a causal relation to the desires described under (a) and (b), and then offers an alternative causal relation between life scripts and (a) and (b). Rather, by having life scripts that make us desire (a) and (b) we have the desire for relatedness, the metaphysical relationship and the explanatory relationship are mereological rather than causal.

(iv) 'I'm sceptical of the explanation offered. The "relationships" that typically develop between romantic partners are simply aspects of the romantic relationship, rather than distinct relationships. So, (1) is not explanatory in the way you suggest.'

For some of the relationships mentioned, this objection does not seem plausible – becoming a co-parent or a 'son-in-law of her parents' seem like distinct relationships from that of romantic partner. However, for some of the other relationships mentioned the objection does seem plausible. For instance, although people can have the relationship of sexual partners without having the romantic relationship, when those who have a romantic relationship start having sex it is not clear that this is best described as their adding a new type of relationship. However, when we consider how we should best describe cases of the latter sort, the objection becomes less problematic. Plausibly, when romantic partners start having sex this is best described as their moving towards a more prototypical form of romantic relationship. So, this is to say that the romantic relationship in its prototypical form will have as constitutive parts what we would otherwise call other types of relationship (say, friend, sexual partner).

(v) 'I'm sceptical of the desirability of satisfying the desire for relatedness. Romantic relationships are a historically contingent social kind, emanating from the courtly love of the troubadours, 18th century bourgeois individualism, 19th century Romanticism, with a glazing of Hollywood movies. So, it's not desirable to satisfy the desires constitutive of romantic relationships. In fact, you are making me feel quite nauseous.'

The empirical literature about the historical contingency or otherwise of romantic relationships is voluminous and filled with controversy. At the least, much of the empirical literature runs

counter to the objector's claim. The influential study of the anthropologists William Jankowiak and Edward Fischer states that 'romantic love constitutes a human universal, or at the least a near-universal,' finding descriptions of incidents that they classified as romantic love in 147 out of the 166 cultures surveyed (Jankowiak and Fischer 1992, 154). More importantly, it is implausible that the historical contingency of romantic relationships would make it the case that the desires that it involves aim at things that are not in fact desirable. A similar debate rages about whether 'homosexual' is a natural kind or a social kind (Pickett 2020). Supposing that the latter is true, it would be bizarre to infer that the desires associated with that social kind aim at things that are not desirable. Again, the fact that a mother especially desires a visit from her children on 'Mother's Day' is an artefact of the most fragile and contingent social kind, but this is not an interesting objection to the claim that it is especially desirable for her children to visit her on that day.

(vi) 'I'm sceptical regarding the thing to be explained, (a) and (b). I have a romantic relationship, but I desire to have friends who are "just mine" rather than only having friends who are also friends of my romantic partner. I also desire solitude and space. So, the desire for relatedness is not a constitutive part of the romantic relationship.'

I entirely sympathize with the objector's desires. One way of answering this objection is to note that a human being can have one desire that inclines them to X and have another desire that inclines them to not-X. The claim that the romantic relationship constitutively involves a desire for relatedness is not the claim that this desire consistently outweighs all other desires we may have, such as those noted by the objector. Nevertheless, we can identify ways in which the desire for relatedness makes itself felt. For instance, suppose the objector's romantic partner said 'I'd like to get to know your friend Jay. I don't really know Jay, but since Jay is such a big part of your life, I'd like to get to know them.' It would be perfectly sensible for our objector to respond by citing some desire of theirs that weighs against such a plan, e.g., 'I like having a friend who doesn't know you so well, so that I have someone I can talk to about my life without them feeling that they have to filter the things they say because of their friendship with you' or again 'I don't want my relationship with Jay to get mixed up in their relationship with you – when Jay asks me how I am doing I don't want to reflexively say "We are fine."' By contrast, it

would seem odd to respond without citing such a desire, instead simply citing the absence of a desire for relatedness; ‘Sure, Jay is a big part of my life, but that doesn’t mean that I’d like you to get to know them. I don’t have any desires inclining me against such a plan, I just don’t desire that you get to know my friends and family; why would I?’

Another way of answering such an objection is to note that the desire to be related to someone as one can be is understood in a practical modal register. So, where the objector really has no desire that their romantic partner be friends with Jay, this is consistent with the objector having a desire for relatedness towards their romantic partner, so long as there is some reason why such a friendship is practically impossible or (more likely) why such a friendship would make the romantic partners less related (or bear a risk of this) by negatively impacting their existing relationships. For instance, the objector might be someone who easily gets insecure over relationships between their romantic partners and their friends.

In the sort of case in which the objector has no countervailing desire, nor a reason explaining why relationships between their romantic partner and their friends and family would not function as a way of satisfying the desire for relatedness, it seems that such an objector’s romantic partner would rightly question whether their relationship was prototypically romantic.

Analogous responses also defuse the objector who desires solitude and space – perhaps this desire contends with and the desire for relatedness, or perhaps the objectors desire for relatedness does not extend to a desire to live with their romantic partner all the time because they are the sort of person who (for example) gets jaded and contemptuous when they spend too much uninterrupted time with someone, who finds that absence really does make the heart grow fonder. In such cases, not having the desires that are typical romantic relationships are simply idiosyncratic ways in which the desire for relatedness is best satisfied.

(vii) ‘I’m sceptical regarding the thing to be explained. I am in a romantic relationship, and I now experience the desires described under (a) and (b), but I did not experience them from the outset of the romantic relationship, e.g., I did not immediately desire to co-reside with my

romantic partner or become their spouse! So, the desire for relatedness is not a constitutive part of the romantic relationship.'

One might again respond that the desires in question were present but accompanied by more powerful countervailing desires, e.g., simple prudence preventing one from hastily moving in with a romantic partner or marrying them. This response has some plausibility since, again, I am confident that readers will be able to adduce many anecdotes of romantic partners who did move in together or marry in startlingly short spaces of time. I think a better response is to note that the desire for relatedness is only a constitutive part of the romantic relationship, meaning that temporal parts of a romantic relationship can lack it. As more and more of the desires described under (a) and (b) began occurring one would rightly be more confident in describing the relationship as a romantic one ('I thought we were just hooking up, but then he started introducing me to his friends, then we met his sister for lunch, so it was becoming something more'), and one would be more confident in describing the relationship as more prototypically romantic, indicating that the desire for relatedness is a constitutive part of the romantic relationship.

(viii) 'I'm sceptical regarding the negative claim of the thing to be explained. I am a parent, and I desire friendship with my child, and I desire to be friends with their friends. So, the desire for relatedness is not only a constitutive part of the romantic relationship.'

For one thing, claiming that the desire for relatedness is only a constitutive part of the romantic relationship is compatible with saying that certain other types of relationship have as constitutive parts the desire for certain other types of relationships – just not the desire to be as related to someone as one can. So, granting that parents typically desire friendship with their child and friendship with the child's friends (which seems doubtful) this would not be tantamount to a desire for relatedness since it seems some other desires are absent, e.g., it seems that parents do not typically desire to co-reside with their adult child.

For another thing, if the desire for relatedness is also a constitutive part of this type of relationship then we should judge that the parent who does not desire to be friends with the friends of their child counts as a less prototypical parent than the parent who does, but this

seems wrong. The same responses hold for other types of relationship – perhaps friendship involves a desire to be friends with the friends of one’s friend, but this is not tantamount to a desire to be as related to the friend as one can, and likewise where this desire is absent the friendship does not seem less prototypical.

Co-parenting satisfies the desire for relatedness in a unique and important way

When two people become parents of the same child they gain a new relationship to one another, that of co-parent. When romantic partners become co-parents they satisfy the desire for relatedness in a new way – two people who desire to be as closely related as they can may now say to each other ‘You are the mother/father of my child.’ It seems self-evident that when people become co-parents they become related in a unique and important way – romantic partners who join one social club together rather than another do not become related in a unique way, and romantic partners who get a goldfish together become related in a new way that is not so important. A complete description of the co-parental relationship cannot be attempted here. I make a few observations about the co-parental relationship that pertain especially to how it satisfies the desire for relatedness in a unique and important way. I do this by observing a few properties of the parent-child relationship and how these properties carry over into the relationship between co-parents.

First, the parent-child relationship is *temporally enduring* – it is one which (as the parent) one may reasonably expect to last until one’s own death. The childhood of one’s child lasts nearly two decades, and after childhood ends the parent-child relationship endures in a different form. This feature of the parent-child relationship carries over into the relationship between co-parents – co-parents are bound together in a particularly intense way for nearly two decades as they co-operate in raising their child, and for the rest of their lives will continue to share a relationship in virtue of their child.

Second, the parent-child relationship is largely *non-discretionary* for the parent; it is a relationship which a parent cannot choose to exit outside of the most extreme cases. At the least, there is extremely strong moral reason not to exit the parent-child relationship. More than this, we might say that conceptually a parent cannot exit the relationship. This is shown by

the relationship's ongoing normative demands in even the most unfortunate circumstances, i.e., an abusive or estranged parent is still subject to certain normative demands of parenthood, such as helping to pay for the material support of the child. Since co-parents are co-parents in virtue of having parent-child relationships with the same child, and since those relationships are non-discretionary, their co-parental relationship is also non-discretionary.

Together, *temporally enduring* and *non-discretionary* form the grain of truth in the idea of 'having a baby to save the relationship.' Having a child together is not a sensible way to save a romantic relationship, but it is a way of creating a different type of relationship between the two parties, one that is *temporally enduring* and *non-discretionary*. By contrast, romantic relationships are often much less temporally enduring, and they seem to be discretionary.

Third, the parent-child relationship is *demanding*; the normative demands of the parent-child relationship are strong and are not easily overridden by other normative demands. Someone ought, at most margins, fulfil the normative demands of the parent-child relationship rather than fulfil the normative demands of friendship, or the normative demands of filial piety, or the normative demands of their own well-being, and so forth, where conflicts arise.

Fourth, the parent-child relationship is *expansive*; its normative demands touch on almost every aspect of a parent's life – what their career path will be, how they arrange their finances, where they will live, the example they set in quotidian choices such as the food they eat and the words they use, how they spend what might otherwise be their free time, and so forth. By contrast, the normative demands of a professional code, of lawyering or medicine, may be highly demanding but not very expansive.

I suggest that *demanding* and *expansive* carry over into the co-parental relationship. Since these are properties that pertain to you in virtue of your parent-child relationship, one sees them as properties that also pertain in similar though not identical ways to one's co-parent. If you think you owe it to your child not to continually be on your smartphone in front of your child, then (barring some complicating factor) you will rightly think that your co-parent owes it to your child not to continually be on their smartphone in front of your child. Since this is treatment owed to one's child, one sees oneself as having a kind of moral power concerning

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one’s co-parent. Vice versa, recognizing that one’s co-parent is bound by a like responsibility to the child, one will see one’s co-parent as having a kind of moral power concerning oneself. Intuitively, if your co-parent judges that your solitary hobbies are taking up too much of your time, that rather you owe your child more of your time and attention, and requests that you change, their judgments and requests provide one with significant moral reason to act differently. Intuitively, the co-parent who ignores such judgements and requests, who sees these as providing as little moral reason to act differently in their treatment of the child as the stray comments of acquaintances, is not an excellent co-parent. I argue for this view more fully elsewhere (Hunt 2021; 2019).

A relationship with these four features relates people together in an important way and, so far as I can think, a unique way, whether one conceives of relationships as constituted by shared activities, norms, or narratives. Co-parenthood perhaps shares with some other types of familial relations that it is temporally enduring and non-discretionary, but, adding to this, it seems that there is no other relationship in which, as an adult, someone else has this type of moral power concerning an expanse of one’s life or, vice versa, in which one has this type of moral power over an expanse of another adult’s life. Although platonic parents do become related in such a way when they have a child together, since only those with a romantic relationship have a desire for relatedness that is satisfied in this important and unique way, we may say that (3) The desire for relatedness is satisfied in this unique and important way by, and only by, romantic parenting.

Conclusion

I have argued that the romantic relationship involves a certain desire, a desire for relatedness. This means that when those in a romantic relationship become co-parents this desire is satisfied, and this means that when platonic parents become co-parents no such desire is satisfied. I emphasize the limited nature of my inquiry here; it focuses on a single aspect of romantic parenting as against platonic parenting. Likewise, I emphasize that having a co-parent is, for platonic parents, surely a relationship adds much value to their lives – but not the value of satisfying the desire for relatedness in an important and unique way.

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