



# *The Longingness Complex:* **Falling in Love with Reward of the Journey**

*A Subjective View on We Desire The Love We  
Believe We Deserve*

*Aren Jayanthan (I am not a professional and this has not been proofread, please do your own research.)*

*Special thanks to Emily LaFave, for helping me realize that longingness is a feature, not a bug.*

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Unreviewed, Objectively Researched, Subjectively Organized Paper (printer-friendly)

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

Reinhold Niebuhr

## INTRODUCTION

While longingness can apply to many different things, such as careers, material desires, and other stuff, this paper will revolve around romance and genuine connections<sup>1</sup> with people.

### The main overarching ideas:

- Theory/hypotheticals end where circumstantial evidence begins
- We desire that which we do not have
- Love doesn't exist, it is in the movies. It's not about the instant happiness, but **believing magic still exists**. And more specifically the magic in the journey
- Romantic relationships and value is built over time
- Reward as in completion milestones, not as final end points

<sup>1</sup> Social vs emotional loneliness: you can be socially around people but lack meaningful connections on an emotional level. This will be a future paper.

- Dispositional Hope vs. State Hope and Perception of Effort Redirection/Effort Justification<sup>2</sup>

**More on a personal note** (because outlining this paper without proper context will be pretty boring): I was trying to figure out why a couple different internal thought processes were happening, such as:

- Emotional vulnerability creating possible subconscious romantic feelings
- Not remembering details about women vs easier with men because I don't want to emotionally invest in women that I don't want to be a spouse
  - I love understanding people but that means I have remember more about them
- Boundaries of platonic relationship behaviors
- A failure to be able to identify what constitutes flirting vs what constitute just genuine, emotional connection vs what constitutes just a one-sided I like it but she's just being her.

This and a bunch more went into Anthropic's Claud and I got this starting point:

*The core issue: **You're starved for a specific kind of attention***

*When a woman gives you soft eye contact, speaks gently, and seems genuinely interested in understanding you - you're not necessarily responding to her specifically or to romance.*

*You're responding to:*

- **Nurturance and emotional attunement** - the kind of care you mentioned missing from a maternal relationship
- **Being seen and valued** - someone paying close attention to you as a person

- **Emotional safety** - a non-threatening, warm interaction style

*This is what psychologists call "unmet attachment needs." Because you didn't get consistent emotional attuniveness early on, you're highly responsive to it now - like someone who grew up food-insecure might have a stronger reaction to abundant food.*

*What's likely happening in your "melting" moments:*

*Neurologically, you're probably experiencing:*

- **Oxytocin release** - the bonding hormone, activated by warm social connection
- **Dopamine response** - reward system lighting up from positive attention
- **Amygdala quieting** - your threat-detection system relaxing in the presence of warmth

*Your brain isn't distinguishing between "romantic interest" and "the kind of emotional nurturance I've been missing my whole life." It just knows: this feels really good, I want more of this.*

SOooooooooo I went down the Attachment Theory rabbit hole and have another paper on that<sup>3</sup>, and this paper is going to address my subjective attachment issue.

**Side tangent:** why make this a public and not private conversation? Because literally no one is watching. I don't want to develop some sort of conditioning to social validation on a personal level and forget everything I was thinking about.

## LONGINGNESS DEFINED

### Super definition for longingness:

*An intense, urgent, or abnormal, yet conscious, spontaneous inclination or incitement to some usually unpremeditated action toward something*

<sup>2</sup> I really wanted to add this to this paper since it fits in really well but there's a whole bunch of research to add which would double the length of this paper. Besides, this paper is more opinion based rather than science-backed or researched-based.

<sup>3</sup> Attachment Theory: Objective View of We Desire The Love We Believe We Deserve (February 2026)

*that promises enjoyment or satisfaction in its attainment, especially for something unattainable.*

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- **Longingness**<sup>4</sup>: Longing and Desire
  - **Longing**<sup>5</sup>: a strong desire especially for something unattainable: craving
    - **Craving**<sup>6</sup>: an intense, urgent, or abnormal desire or longing
  - **Desire**<sup>7</sup>:
    - As a verb: to long or hope for, exhibit or feel desire for; to express a wish for; to feel the loss of
    - As a noun: conscious impulse toward something that promises enjoyment or satisfaction in its attainment; something longed or hoped for : something desired
      - **Impulse**<sup>8</sup>: a sudden spontaneous inclination or incitement to some usually unpremeditated action

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Before I get into the main concepts, **Schrödinger's Limerence** and **Pavlov's Treadmill** (these are not actual terms, just a creative rendition), I'm gonna add some context. If you just want to dive into the meat of this paper, feel free to skip forward to the corresponding sections and reference the Context section as needed.

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<sup>4</sup> Merriam-Webster: Longingness

<sup>5</sup> Merriam-Webster: Longing

<sup>6</sup> Merriam-Webster: Craving

<sup>7</sup> Merriam-Webster: Desire

<sup>8</sup> Merriam-Webster: Impulse

<sup>9</sup> **Reinforcement theory** (also called **operant conditioning**) is a behavioral theory developed by B.F. Skinner that explains how consequences shape behavior. The core idea: behaviors followed by positive consequences tend to increase, while those followed by negative consequences tend to decrease.

<sup>10</sup> Bounce back as evidence to do something again (such as getting into another relationship) or as failure to not do anything again. The latter option could mean never realizing that most things in life are similar because it rhymes but with different intentions.

Or the TL;DR version:

- **Schrödinger's cat**: a superposition can exist of something being true or false, or one thing and another, until it is observed.
- **Pavlov's conditioning**: over time we can be conditioned to do something, whether consciously and willingly or subconsciously and possibly unwillingly trained (for example, willingly can be learning a new habit or going on a diet whereas unwillingly can be being a constant state of fear because of someone else's behavior.
- **Limerence** is what is usually termed 'being in love' - a specific mental state characterized primarily by intrusive thinking about another person.
- **Hedonic treadmill/adaptation** is the theory that people tend to return to a relatively stable baseline level of happiness despite major positive or negative life events. Like a treadmill, you can run faster or slower, but you stay in roughly the same place.

**Schrödinger's Limerence** is seeing the magic in the superposition of not knowing the end and being comfortable with the unknown. (Whether it will result in a reward, punishment<sup>9</sup>, or nothing at all, or if you will bounce back from it<sup>10</sup>.)

- But more importantly, **falling in love with the truth**, not the idea/illusion/delusion of the truth (assuming it's not just a lie disguised a truth

(while taking into consideration that it could be disguised by self, disguised by other, or both)).

**Pavlov's Treadmill:** conditioning towards complacency and self-induced obsolescence. People tend to greatly underestimate the amount of power they have in their lives (possibly as a responsibility/accountability/ownership load avoidance).

- **One part of Pavlov's treadmill** is having the discretion of asking more questions, both in volume and precision.

## CONTEXT SECTION

**Schrödinger's Cat**<sup>11</sup> is the absurdity of applying quantum superposition to macroscopic objects.

Schrödinger described a scenario with a sealed box containing: a cat, a radioactive atom, a Geiger counter<sup>12</sup>, a vial of poison, and a hammer mechanism

If the radioactive atom decays (50% chance within the timeframe), the Geiger counter detects it, triggers the hammer, which breaks the vial and releases poison that kills the cat.

The paradox is that, according to quantum mechanics, the radioactive atom exists in a superposition - simultaneously decayed AND not decayed - until observed. This means the entire system (including the cat) should also be in superposition. Therefore, **the cat would be both alive and dead until someone opens the box and observes it.**

*One can even set up quite ridiculous cases. A cat is penned up in a steel chamber, along with the following device (which must be secured against direct interference by the cat): in a Geiger counter there is a tiny bit of radioactive substance, so small, that perhaps in the course of the hour one of the atoms decays, but also, with equal probability, perhaps none; if it happens, the counter tube discharges and through a relay releases a hammer which shatters a small flask of hydrocyanic acid. If one has left this entire system to itself for an hour, one would say that the cat still lives if meanwhile no atom has decayed.*<sup>13</sup>

### **Pavlov's Conditioning/Classical Conditioning:**

A couple context points:

- Two types of reflexes Pavlov distinguished between: **unconditioned/Inborn/nervous reflexes** (automatic, instinctive responses) and **conditioned reflexes** (learned associations).
- **Salivary Conditioning Experiments:** Pavlov trained dogs to associate a neutral stimulus (like a bell or metronome) with food by repeatedly pairing them together, eventually causing the dogs to salivate just from hearing the bell alone, even without food present. Reflexive responses could be learned through association, establishing the foundation of classical conditioning.
- **The Freedom Reflex Experiment:** Pavlov placed dogs in restraining stands and observed that they initially stayed calm but increasingly struggled to escape over time, scratching and gnawing to break free. He interpreted this as an innate "freedom reflex" – a biological drive to

<sup>11</sup> Schrödinger, E. (1935)

<sup>12</sup> A **Geiger counter** is a device that detects and measures ionizing radiation, such as alpha particles, beta particles, and gamma rays. The device contains a tube filled with low-pressure gas. When radiation passes through the tube, it ionizes the gas atoms, creating a brief electrical pulse. Each pulse is counted and often produces the characteristic clicking sound associated with Geiger counters - more clicks mean more radiation detected.

<sup>13</sup> Schrödinger, E. (1980) (J. D. Trimmer, Translation)

resist restraint—which he considered a fundamental unconditioned reflex that might be a precursor to free will.

*Our starting point has been Descartes' idea of the nervous reflex<sup>14</sup>. This is a genuine scientific conception, since it implies necessity.*

*It may be summed up as follows:*

- *An external or internal stimulus falls on some one or other nervous receptor and gives rise to a nervous impulse;*
- *this nervous impulse<sup>15</sup> is transmitted along nerve fibres to the central nervous system,*
- *and there, on account of existing nervous connections, it gives rise to a fresh impulse which passes along outgoing nerve fibres to the active organ, where it excites a special activity of the cellular structures.*

*Thus a stimulus appears to be connected of necessity with a definite response, as cause with effect.<sup>16</sup>*

**The Salivary Conditioning Experiments:** Pavlov describes the core conditioning phenomenon:

*Let us return now to the simplest reflex from which our investigations started. If food or some rejectable substance finds its way into the mouth, a secretion of saliva is produced...*

*But, in addition to this, a similar reflex secretion is evoked when these substances are placed at a distance from the dog and the receptor organs affected are only those of smell and sight.*

*Even the vessel from which the food has been given is sufficient to evoke an alimentary reflex*

*complete in all its details; and, further, the secretion may be provoked even by the sight of the person who brought the vessel, or by the sound of his footsteps.*

**The "Freedom Reflex" Experiment,** this experiment demonstrated inhibition of reflexes:

- A dog was placed in a stand with loose loops around its legs
- Initially given food at intervals
- First response: The dog ate little, lost weight, became excited, struggled constantly, salivated heavily, showed "ceaseless muscular exertion" and "breathlessness"
- Over time: "The freedom reflex was being inhibited" - the dog grew quieter and eventually ate normally
- Conclusion: Showed that reflexes can be inhibited through experience

**Side note:** conditioning a biological reaction is similar to genuine manipulators who learn that others will pay attention when they are in a state of need (crying, learned helplessness) to elicit a reaction, maybe due to the lack of communication skills.

**Limerence<sup>17</sup>** is what is usually termed 'being in love' - a specific mental state characterized primarily by intrusive thinking about another person (the "limerent object" or LO) and an acute longing for reciprocation.

*Limerence is, above all else, mental activity. It is an interpretation of events, rather than the events themselves. You admire, you are physically*

<sup>14</sup> A **nervous reflex** (also called a reflex arc) is an automatic, involuntary response to a stimulus that happens without conscious thought. Your nervous system processes these reactions extremely quickly, often before your brain is even fully aware of what's happening.

<sup>15</sup> A **nervous impulse** (also called a nerve impulse or action potential) is an electrical signal that travels along a nerve cell (neuron). It's the fundamental way that information is transmitted throughout your nervous system.

<sup>16</sup> Pavlov, I. P. (1927)

<sup>17</sup> Tennov, D. (1979)

*attracted, you see, or think you see (or deem it possible to see under "suitable".*

Limerence has features such as intrusive, obsessive thinking, longing for reciprocation, mood dependency, exclusivity, fear of rejection, intensification through adversity, hypersensitivity to reciprocity, and physical sensations.

Limerance could and might possibly include the desire for urgent availability (not so much emotional but convenient).

**Hedonic treadmill/adaptation** is the theory that people tend to return to a relatively stable baseline level of happiness despite major positive or negative life events. Like a treadmill, you can run faster or slower, but you stay in roughly the same place.

(I can't find the original paper<sup>18</sup> available online.)

*From Lottery winners and accident victims: Is happiness relative?*<sup>19</sup>:

*Adaptation level theory*<sup>20</sup> suggests that both contrast and habituation will operate to prevent the winning of a fortune from elevating happiness as much as might be expected.

*Contrast with the peak experience of winning should lessen the impact of ordinary pleasures,*

*while habituation should eventually reduce the value of new pleasures made possible by winning.*

- Lottery winners were not significantly happier than controls
- Accident victims who became paraplegic<sup>21</sup> were less happy initially but not as unhappy as expected<sup>22</sup>

Both groups adapted substantially to their new circumstances.

From Ryan and Deci<sup>23</sup>'s *On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being*<sup>24</sup>:

*The first of these can be broadly labeled **hedonism** and reflects the view that well-being consists of pleasure or happiness.*

*The second view, both as ancient and as current as the hedonic view, is that well-being consists of more than just happiness.*

*It lies instead in the actualization of human potentials. This view has been called **eudaimonism**, conveying the belief that well-being consists of fulfilling or realizing one's daimon or true nature.*

<sup>18</sup> Brickman, P., & Campbell, D. T. (1971)

<sup>19</sup> Brickman, P., Coates, D., & Janoff-Bulman, R. (1978)

<sup>20</sup> **Adaptation Level Theory** is a psychological theory developed by Harry Helson that explains how people perceive and judge stimuli relative to their prior experiences and current context, rather than in absolute terms. Helson, H. (1964)

<sup>21</sup> **Paraplegia** is the symptom of paralysis that mainly affects your legs. It can be a complete injury (total loss of function, incomplete injury (partial loss of function), flaccid paraplegia (muscles don't work), spastic paraplegia (muscles contract uncontrollably) (Cleveland Clinic: Paraplegia)

<sup>22</sup> "Table 1 indicates that accident victims recalled their past as having been happier than did controls (which we may call a nostalgia effect), while experiencing their present as less happy than controls. It should be noted, however, that the paraplegic rating of present happiness is still above the midpoint of the scale and that the accident victims did not appear nearly as unhappy as might have been expected."

<sup>23</sup> Both developed **Self-Determination Theory** and the three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000)

<sup>24</sup> Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001)

*The two traditions—hedonism and eudaimonism—are founded on distinct views of human nature and of what constitutes a good society.*

*Accordingly, they ask different questions concerning how developmental and social processes relate to well-being, and they implicitly or explicitly prescribe different approaches to the enterprise of living.*

## SCHRÖDINGER'S LIMERENCE: THE REWARD OF THE JOURNEY VS. DESTINATION

*It is not beauty that makes us love, but love that makes us see beauty. - Leo Tolstoy (War and Peace)*

*If one loves anyone, one loves the whole person, just as they are and not as one would like them to be. - Leo Tolstoy (Anna Karenina)*

(Looking at the reward of the journey and not the destination does not imply to not have a destination in mind, just not to obsess over the conclusion of a journey and have a unreasonable expectation of total success.)

It's not about the reward or the destination because either one may or may not change along

the way. This is the Schrödinger's cat idea: it is about the superposition of both possible and impossible until it is observed. Clarity of the journey's purpose is always seen in hindsight, but really foggy in foresight.

To take the risk of starting or continuing the pursuit requires some sort of high reward/low cost<sup>25</sup> justification (emotional and/or logical), assuming there is not already a strong intrinsic motivation<sup>26</sup>.

(Sorry, probably should have clarified this point: **this paper is focusing on the romantic pursuit**, regardless of the sexual pursuit/desire. Romantic without sexual is companionship and sexual without romantic is transactional.<sup>27</sup>)

Lol, I just remembered this is a opinion paper. I want to find **someone who is an asset**, not a liability. Again, not as an absolute, but in a way that she makes life easier on an emotional level, either by increasing happiness or decreasing the stress of obstacles/emotional friction points/etc.

That's where limerence comes in.

*In humans, the attraction system (standardly called romantic love, obsessive love, passionate love, being in love, infatuation, or limerence) is also characterized by feelings of exhilaration, "intrusive thinking" about the love object, and a craving for emotional union with this partner or potential partner.<sup>28</sup>*

<sup>25</sup> Similar to Social Exchange Theory and behavioral economics. Humans have a natural tendency to weigh the cost and benefits when making decisions.

<sup>26</sup> From Self-Determination Theory: **Intrinsic motivation** is the drive to engage in an activity for its own sake - because it is inherently interesting, enjoyable, or satisfying - rather than for external rewards or pressures.

<sup>27</sup> I haven't done a deep dive into this yet but here's some surface-level research notes on this (my way of thinking probably has some major logical errors): Helen Fisher (refer to the corresponding footnote) **sex drive**, the **attraction system**, and the **attachment system**. Sternberg's triangular theory identifies **intimacy, passion, and commitment** as separate components that combine differently. Research on "**inertia theory**" shows couples can stay together due to constraints (shared lease, kids, habit) even when dedication is low.

<sup>28</sup> Human romantic love is suggested to involve three distinct but interconnected brain systems: **Lust** (sex drive) - mediated by androgens and estrogens, **Romantic attraction** (early-stage intense love) - associated with dopamine and norepinephrine, **Attachment** (long-term bonding) - associated with oxytocin and vasopressin. These systems can operate independently or together. Fisher, H. E., Aron, A., Mashek, D., Li, H., & Brown, L. L. (2002)

It's turning the early infatuation into a partnership, while also knowing multiple things (such as trust is built over time, emotional awareness) can happen months after a conflict or insecurity, etc.

At the same time, there is a massive level of understanding to offset the natural human tendency to default to indecisiveness and expectations (threat perception and analysis), mostly to ensure there is

- 1) a level of healthy communication and mutually assured trust<sup>29</sup> and
- 2) leaves room for autonomy and self-identity within the relationship.

That last part is really important, because the way I see it (at the time of writing this paper) is that one part of a relationship isn't about love<sup>30</sup> but about two people wanting to make the "us" work. Thick or thin, with all kinds of adversity, all that good stuff and just choosing to stay, maintain, and support.

Jeez, lots of apologies if this is all over the place, I'm typing the way I speak. My point is that limerence, though by definition is the early on intense butterflies and desire for reciprocity, is used here as the **magic of the unknown**.

So as a whole (but loosely defined), **Schrödinger's Limerence** is seeing the magic in the superposition of not knowing the end and being comfortable with the unknown. (Whether it will result in a reward, punishment<sup>31</sup>, or nothing at all, or if you will bounce back from it<sup>32</sup>.)

<sup>29</sup> This is like Mutually Assured Destruction, which is more on threat and deterrence, used here in a not-as-cynical creative analogy. This is also a part of being emotionally vulnerable.

<sup>30</sup> Ok yeah, obviously love is important but I mean love from the connotation that love itself doesn't exist but rather believing that magic exists in the form of love. This is kinda like how Christmas and Santa Clause doesn't exist but that Christmas and the social unity is magical. This is also like Valentines Day, Fourth of July, etc. The idea that people understand and have an open mind to friction points like taking the day off or explaining how much something means to another person.

<sup>31</sup> **Reinforcement theory** (also called **operant conditioning**) is a behavioral theory developed by B.F. Skinner that explains how consequences shape behavior. The core idea: behaviors followed by positive consequences tend to increase, while those followed by negative consequences tend to decrease.

<sup>32</sup> Bounce back as evidence to do something again (such as getting into another relationship) or as failure to not do anything again. The latter option could mean never realizing that most things in life are similar because it rhymes but with different intentions.

- But more importantly, **falling in love with the truth**, not the idea/illusion/delusion of the truth (assuming it's not just a lie disguised a truth (while taking into consideration that it could be disguised by self, disguised by other, or both)).

Imagine doing something for years, building a career, family, an entire world or emotional empire, and waking up one day seeing that it was an entire waste of time/energy/effort, because of a lie(s) that was told (internal or external).

*I was too cowardly to do what I knew to be right, as I had been too cowardly to avoid doing what I knew to be wrong. Quite an untaught genius, I made the discovery of the line of action for myself.*  
- Charles Dickens (*Great Expectations*)

Yeah, disappointment. Fun stuff.

## PAVLOV'S TREADMILL: CONDITIONED OBSOLESCENCE

*The magic you are looking for is in the work you are avoiding.* - Chris Williamson

Pavlov's conditioning is used here to describe all the different forms of conditioning I'm thinking of at this moment:

- the **active** (deliberate, willing),
- **passive** (not deliberate, willing),

- **self-conditioning** (deliberate externally, unaware),
- and **completely unaware** (deliberate for self but not for others, not deliberate, willing/unwilling, unaware/aware. This is sooooo dependent on so many factors and I haven't thought it all the way through).

This is what communication and trust with emotional vulnerability is so so so important, because it reduces the time between stimulus (triggers, insecurities, fears) and action (redirection, reduction, reprogramming) due to a mutual understanding and lack of ridicule or unnecessary judgement.

(I am saying this while keeping in mind the opposite of the Spotlight Effect<sup>33</sup>, where there can be the complete unawareness of something that is normal for self may be misinterpreted by others. Such as a messy desk is perfect for one person's creativity but not for a perfectionist.)

I'm obviously overthinking this, HOWEVER I am fully caffeinated sooooooooooooo story time!

(This story happened less than two minutes ago so this is gonna be fun.)

You know the corporate communication? The kinda passive, good advice, but stated in a terrible tone of voice that doesn't sound considerate. Sometimes the person is stating the obvious but not addressing the actual pain point (such as "this company is like a family and we should be supporting each other" but people are getting paid for this because it's a job, not a lifestyle that requires actual emotional investment), and all that good stuff.

- The idea that some people work so they can live and others live so they can work.

So I overheard this person on a video call, in a public area, passively complain (to the folks on the call) that there is, and I quote "sorry that there

is background noise, I couldn't go into my private office because of XYZ" yada yada yada.

I'm over here appalled. Like dude I can hear you, tf you calling me background noise??! (I genuinely don't care but I love little bits of unnecessary drama. It makes life more fun.)

Me and the person I was talking to, after hearing this, just listened on the call. It was basically what I said earlier: "this company is like a family and we should be supporting each other" and "when I need help XYZ came to help me and managed the load so why can't we do this too" and all this other baloney.

I'm over over simplifying this. Those two sentences were extended into a five minute monologue.

It sounded like one of those essays in school that the teacher marks as a minimum 3,000 word count on how mitochondria is the powerhouse of the cell, when it should be a three paragraph max paper.

- And because of the unrealistic expectations (such as word counts or meeting lengths), it causes filler and a bunch of junk to meet a quota/statistic.

(If I ever went into corporate America, I would get three HR lawsuits before my first paycheck.)

Anyways, what is seemingly obvious to me (be honest with kindness, speak only if it improves upon the silence, stab the emotional subtext<sup>34</sup>, and a bunch of other stuff so we can actually get the job done without the emotional ambiguities) isn't obvious to someone else who is literally doing their job the way they were taught to do it.

(I know right? Doing a job the way someone else wants it done rather than the way it should be done? In this economy?)

<sup>33</sup> Gilovich, T., Medvec, V. H., & Savitsky, K. (2000)

<sup>34</sup> Someone says something but you get a feeling that there is an underlying insecurity that isn't being addressed, but to attack the insecurity requires an openness to vulnerability on their part, which goes into the idea that the quality of the listener is just as important as the desire to feel heard.

**My point is:** Classical/Pavlov's conditioning is just something that happens over time, for better or for worse. In relationships, it can become something that builds, destroys, or stagnates.

(Stagnation<sup>35</sup> usually on the imbalance on expectations and perception of value but if I go on that tangent, this would be wayyyyy too long.)

Hedonic adaptation/treadmill is used in this way as the awareness that there is a constant/consistent/instinctual need to default to a relatively stable baseline level of happiness despite major positive or negative life events. Like a treadmill, you can run faster or slower, but you stay in roughly the same place.

To combat this conditioning back to a baseline happiness (oh man this is gonna be a fun analogy), is to **put a treadmill on the treadmill**.

(I think I have too much caffeine right now.)

You are responsible for your happiness, progression, and well-being. Way too many people (either by ignorance or entitlement, aware or not) redirect the burden of the consequences of their actions to other people. Unrealistic expectations almost always leads to being overwhelmed by the additional problems to obtain the dream outcome.

If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

**Thought experiment:** your significant other wants to start a side business. They've seen many many many videos on [insert social media platform] about how easy it is, the low cost of maintaining it, and the high payout for the seemingly low effort.

So they start. Materials, tools, software, all the things that advertise the low effort to do XYZ.

- *Want a website? Here's a low \$ subscription per month as you try to figure that out.*

- *Wait, but you need a good looking website, those default template look plain and boring.*
- *Ok, so for an upfront cost of a \$\$ web designer from this freelancing site, you can get that polished up website.*
- *Hold up hold up, did you think about the legal liability? You might want an LLC so you can mark your expenses as tax deductions.*
- *LLC is gonna cost a fixed amount (and we can't control that since the state requires \$\$ for it) however the state also requires a point of contact, and we can do it for \$\$\$ a year, no sweat after it's set up.*

Cool, stack it up after a couple months of small purchases here and there and your significant other is already \$\$\$\$ down and there is no product or service.

**Is that the burden I'm talking about?** No no no, that's not a burden. That's a pursuit and it's not that it can't succeed, it just might take more time. Good things take time to happen. Absolutely.

"Hey honey, you know how much I've been working on it but I need XYZ to get ABC and can I pull a bit from our savings? I mean we saved for our future and this is that future."

(I want to be clear, I'm keeping this intentionally gender ambiguous because it can happen from either person.)

You love them and you want to support them. You're not too sure how it all works, but you've seen those videos too, and that dream outcome seems within reach so it's not entirely unrealistic, right? Plus they're excited, they have more energy (same idea as limerence), they're paying more attention to you because it's an "us" endeavor.

**Clarification:** I'm all for optimism, but realistic optimism. Here's a bit more context: they have no inherent skill set in this domain.

<sup>35</sup> Stagnation analogous to stagnate water breeding the worst microbiome.

Point is, this is a worst case scenario<sup>36</sup>, this could apply to almost anything. Wearing heels, knowing well that a foot ache will happen within an hour, and then expecting your partner to have to carry you or something similar is “romantic” but that’s putting a burden on someone else that they now have to maintain.

*History doesn’t repeat itself, it just rhymes.* Same idea, implicit/passive behaviors may not change, just rhyme until an active effort is put into place to deliberately change.

Yes, maintenance and showing your love is important, and is way less expensive than rebuilding from resentment, however there consideration and future potential within reason.

**One part of Pavlov’s treadmill**, in a nutshell, is having the discretion of asking more questions, both in volume and precision.

*You would die for your family? But would you improve for them? Would you wake up earlier and sleep later so that food will be on the table ten years from now? Would you make your bed every morning so that they would walk in and feel like their life is worth the effort, and not just something they see at a hotel? Would you let go of (and not suppress) your anger because they feel too exhausted to clean the dishes? Would you make your day more efficient so that you are emotionally available for them? Would they do the same for you? Or would they indulge in what feels good at your expense?*

From Theodore Roosevelt<sup>37</sup>: *Freedom from effort in the present merely means that there has been stored up effort in the past.*

Imagine the alternative, you do what feels good and put the burden of responsibility on the other person. Multiple things might come up:

- 1) They would have to *want* to maintain it long term (potentially years). This is the difference between wanting to do vs having to do something. Think of it like someone who is sick. Some people (few, I highly doubt it’s a large number of people statistic) will break up or divorce when their significant other get into a long term sickness or injury. The cost of short term inconveniences for long term burdens is very much possible.
  - 1) This is different from fair-weather friends/relationships (be by me at my best and at my worst).
- 2) Perception of cognitive load, learned helplessness, codependency, or caretaker burnout: it might be easy now but hard later. Because it is a temporary burden, it can be taken up by the other person easily. But once a task is allocated, it can build to full on dependence and complete workload burden. This is basically sortis paradox, at what point does it turn from a temporary to a permanent burden?
- 3) Anterior mid-cingulate cortex<sup>38</sup>, the more you put yourself in uncomfortable situations, the easier the next one gets. And consequently, I think the opposite is true: training your mind to seek comfort (possibly in the pursuit of peace), but not seeking the actual thing that brings peace, which includes capability and resilience. It’s about delaying the time between input and action and becoming better able to handle problems.

<sup>36</sup> Worst case scenarios, as anything else that exists on the extremes of spectrums, are much easier to identify as possible threats or potentials. Humans soooo very much love absolutes and not so much the in-between possibilities.

<sup>37</sup> Roosevelt, T. (1900)

<sup>38</sup> The aMCC is used here as an example but with my own personal interpretation. The actual science behind the aMCC: “Specifically, we propose that its position as a structural and functional hub allows the aMCC to integrate signals from diverse brain systems to predict energy requirements that are needed for attention allocation, encoding of new information, and physical movement, all in the service of goal attainment.” Touroutoglou, A., Andreano, J., Dickerson, B. C., & Barrett, L. F. (2020)

Problems don't end, they just become easier to handle (assuming discomfort is seen as a blessing, not a burden).

This is why I said put a treadmill on a treadmill. It will be so unpredictable and chaotic that you might actually realize that the tool used to ease the burden of going for an actual walk is the same tool that is holding you back.

Smartphones instead of libraries, texting and phone calls that are convenient communication but not genuine connections, non-verbal communication reading and not asking better questions or affect expression<sup>39</sup>, and distinguishing the difference a logical problem and an emotional problem<sup>40</sup>.

Humans are creatures of habit and lazy/forgetful by nature.

**Pavlov's Treadmill:** conditioning towards complacency and self-induced obsolescence. People tend to greatly underestimate the amount of power they have in their lives (possibly as a responsibility/accountability/ownership load avoidance).

It's just about whether they realize life is what you make of it.

Hopefully they also believe it, since it is possible to know something is possible without believing it.

Ignorance is easy. Understanding is difficult. Entertaining a thought without accepting it when powerful emotions are being tossed around is brutal.

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<sup>39</sup> **Affect Theory**, pioneered by psychologist Silvan Tomkins in his 1962 book "Affect Imagery Consciousness": **Affect** - The underlying experience of feeling, emotion, attachment, or mood. **Affect Display/Expression** - How affect is displayed to others through facial expressions, hand gestures, posture, and voice characteristics The opposite would be **alexithymia** - difficulty identifying and describing one's own emotions.

<sup>40</sup> A lot of problems in this world can be self or perceived misinterpretation of a logical solution to an emotional problem or an emotional solution to a logical problem.

<sup>41</sup> Pascal, B. (1958) (W. F. Trotter, Translation)

<sup>42</sup> Diener, E., Lucas, R. E., & Scollon, C. N. (2006)

We desire the love we believe we deserve.

*The struggle alone pleases us, not the victory.*

*We love to see animals fighting, not the victor infuriated over the vanquished. We would only see the victorious end; and, as soon as it comes, we are satiated.*

*It is the same in play, and the same in the search for truth. In disputes we like to see the clash of opinions, but not at all to contemplate truth when found.*

*To observe it with pleasure, we have to see it emerge out of strife. So in the passions, there is pleasure in seeing the collision of two contraries; but when one acquires the mastery, it becomes only brutality.*

*We never seek things for themselves, but for the search. Likewise in plays, scenes which do not rouse the emotion of fear are worthless, so are extreme and hopeless misery, brutal lust, and extreme cruelty.*

- Blaise Pascal<sup>41</sup>

## — CONTEXT SECTION —

### BEYOND THE HEDONIC TREADMILL<sup>42</sup>

*The recent empirical work outlined here indicates that 5 important revisions to the treadmill model are needed.*

- *First, individuals' set points are not hedonically neutral.*

- *Second, people have different set points, which are partly dependent on their temperaments.*
- *Third, a single person may have multiple happiness set points: Different components of well-being such as pleasant emotions, unpleasant emotions, and life satisfaction can move in different directions.*
- *Fourth, and perhaps most important, well-being set points can change under some conditions.*
- *Finally, individuals differ in their adaptation to events, with some individuals changing their set point and others not changing in reaction to some external event.*

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