



COUPLES THERAPY: LOOKING FOR A HEART OF GOLD

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- We forget about the gold. Ultimately, some kind of crisis will lead to cracks in the concrete. Something will fracture the casing. The true adventure of life is finding the gold, our original true nature, deeper than our wounds or defenses.

THE THERAPEUTIC LENS

- “When gold is mined, several tons of dirt must be moved to get an ounce of gold; but one doesn’t go into the mine looking for the dirt – one goes in looking for the gold.” Andrew Carnegie
- Looking for the gold counters the evolutionary tendency toward negativity. The brain is wired with a negativity bias to ensure survival. Yet given free reign, negativity will eventually erode of the emotional infrastructure of the relationship.



WHO ARE WE? OPEN, SENSITIVE,
POWERFULLY VULNERABLE WITH
ENDLESS POTENTIAL BORN INTO A
COMPLEX EMOTIONAL WORLD

Garp Movie

CLEANSE THE
DOORS OF
PERCEPTION....



THE SOUL IS A SHOCK
ABSORBER. THE SELF
EVENTUALLY STARTS TO
CONTRACT AND CLOSE

- It feels safer to contract, close, defend and protect. The open palace of our being becomes a small, confined apartment.
- Yet, falling in love opens new possibilities, new hopes and dreams, new beginnings and a new world to explore. Each partner is pulled towards this new world of the other. Yet, at the same time, each is also scared by the unknown and settles for unconsciously creating something safe, familiar and comfortable.



COUPLES IN DISTRESS HAVE LOST SIGHT OF THE GOLD: UNCONSCIOUS RECREATION OF FAMILIAR LOVE

- An early glimpse of golden possibility occurs during the unconditional safety and happy anticipation of the courtship/romance phase only to give way to what is more familiar: the power struggle, disappointment and distress and, inevitably, protection from these feelings by using time-tested, survival strategies created in childhood.
- These self-protective strategies are the root of the pain in the adult love relationship. Undigested emotion gets triggered and blame for the pain is projected onto the partner. We call this the 80-20 rule. What is going on between partners is the tip of an iceberg. There is a “legacy of attachment” from childhood (wounds, defenses, adaptations) that is holding up the tip of the iceberg.
- The legacy of childhood feels familiar and through an unconscious projection process familiar love is co-created.

DEFICITS IN
PARENTING
AND THE
LARGER
SOCIAL
CONTEXT

ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES

- 1. We are born whole and alive. Our original core energy pulsates, expanding and contracting. Anna Mae embodies the light that is at the core.
- 2. The journey through life is perilous and there are unmet needs and undigested emotion that disturb energy and we adapt, defend, contract and protect.
- 3. Falling in love feels expansive and healing and also aligns with the wish for wholeness and aliveness. But the legacy of attachment eventually reawakens.
- 4. Intimate partners unconsciously re-create familiar love and blame one another for the pain. There are no instruction manuals for helping one another to heal or undo the developmental trauma. We are unconsciously seeking a corrective emotional experience.

WE LOOK THROUGH FILTERS: SAFETY OR DANGER?

- For most, familiar love is not attuned love. Our experience with caregivers tends to be that they were too much (intrusion) or too little (neglect) leading to wounds of abandonment, control or feeling not enough.
- When the amygdala perceives pain, anxiety, threat or danger the hard-wired fight, flight, freeze, fold response is automatically triggered.
- Challenges with significant others is especially troublesome. Historically, the child naturally sought proximity to an attachment figure for help or comfort but when a caregiver was the source of wounding, the child is presented with major conflict resulting in developmental trauma. This also happens in the adult love relationship.

WHAT IS
HAPPENING IN
THE ADULT
LOVE
RELATIONSHIP
HERE?

She feels abandoned and neglected by her partner. She feels alone and mistrustful.

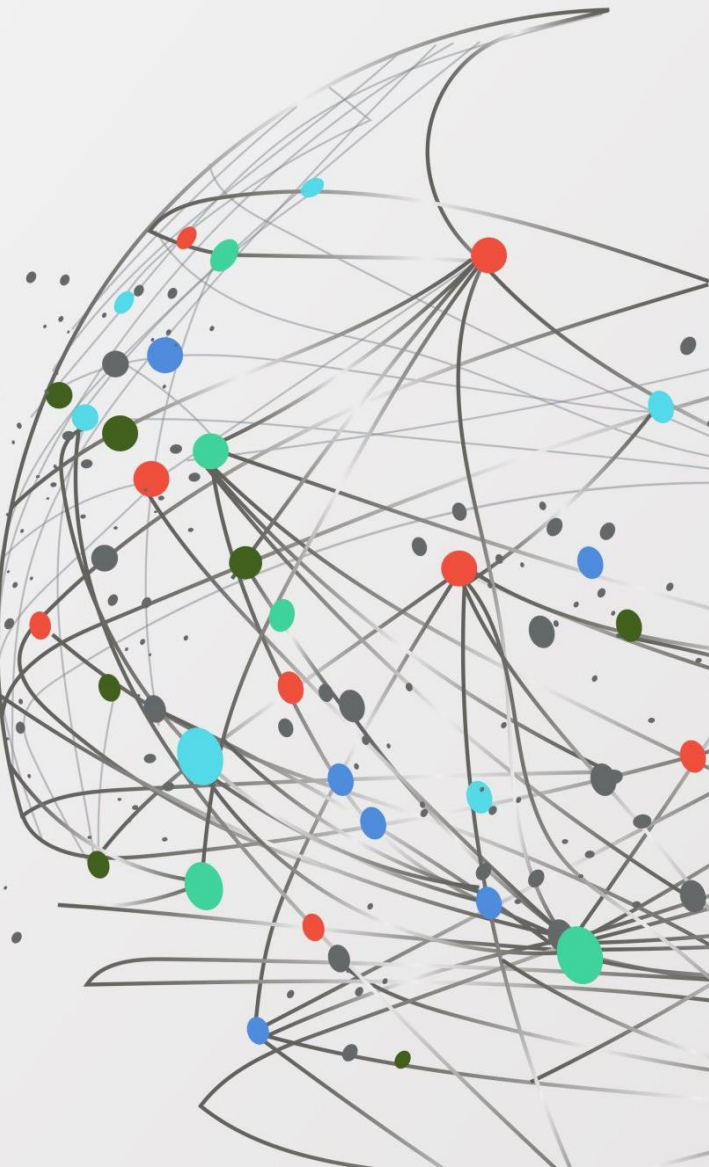
She does her best to please and she also carries grief and resentment.

He distances and avoids because he learned to stay off the radar of difficult others and to be invisible.

Notice how their present experience is colored by the past and the goal is to create a corrective emotional experience.

HOW TO GET THE STORY STRAIGHT

- 1. Take a good individual and relationship history. The partners and their relationship are not a problem to be solved but a mystery to explore.
- 2. Focus on the legacies of attachment including positive/safe experiences, resources, the healthy instinct/impulse that brought them together as well as negative/dangerous/disappointing legacies
- 3. Identify limiting messages from childhood that impact current beliefs, behavior and decisions + facilitate corrective emotional experiences
- 4. Identify and explore triggers by identifying childhood challenge (wounds and defenses), explore longstanding feelings relational need
- 5. Work with the unconscious projection process and expand skills + mindsets



CONNECT THE DOTS

- Listen for similar themes
- It is not an accident that the painful childhood theme is showing up again. It is normal and predictable. The psyche wants to heal and unconsciously recreates similar conditions hoping for a different, more satisfying outcome. It is a form of repetition of compulsion.
- The timelessness of the psyche and the triggers. Childhood shows up again and again until the “wound” is understood and integrated in a new way.


HOW TO CREATE CORRECTIVE EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES

- Hold the tension of the opposites: “Beyond right and wrong/black and white/good and bad/ there is a field. I’ll meet you there” ... with curiosity, openness, respect and empathy. (C.O.R.E.)
- The Intentional Dialogue: Seen, Heard, Understood and Felt (L.O.V.E.)
- The Power of Unconditional Presence and Witnessing: Re-imagining
- The Message(s) of Wholeness I am Longing to Hear
- L.O.V.E. is the G.O.A.L. = John O’Donohue’s poem

“I want to live like a river flows, continually surprised by my own unfolding.”

AMPLIFYING THE GOLD: BUILDING GENERATIVE RESOURCES

- We can never have too many internal (including somatic) and/or external resources in the field
- Some resources have been lost or forgotten, some were never learned, and support can be provided for those that are weak, undeveloped or underused.
- What was going “right” before everything went “wrong”? Hunt for the gold and treasure that can be the basis for expanding resources.
- Internal dialogue leads to becoming relational inside and out and operationalizes self-soothing: Befriending hurt, sadness, jealousy, anxiety, anger, depression, loneliness and shame



The gold is
connecting
from the
core.

TOOLS

- 1. The Intentional Dialogue
- 2. Differentiating Self from Other & Parent from Partner
- 3. Distinguishing Past from Present – “rocking back and forth between the past and the present and living in the present more and more of the time.”
- 4. Defusing Reactivity and Restoring Receptivity
- 5. Disidentifying Personality from the Deeper Core Self

INTEGRATION

- Build connection through empathic bridging (autonomy + affiliation)
- End objectification and polarization - shifting from I=It to I=Thou from fixed to a more fluid and relational identity
- Dialogue is the means and the end



CONTEMPLATE
FORGIVENESS: THE
ULTIMATE GOLD

NO QUICK PATH
IT CAN BE DEMANDING
A PROCESS THAT CAN FREE
YOURSELF
A RADICAL ACT OF LOVE &
DIFFERENTIATION

YOU CAN FORGIVE, LEARN,
NOT FORGET AND HOLD
ACCOUNTABLE

HOW MIGHT YOU FEEL? PROS
AND CONS

FORGIVENESS IS LETTING GO
OF THE STORY AND LIVING
MORE IN THE PRESENT

**“FORGIVENESS IS NOT AN
OCCASIONAL ACT, IT IS A
PERMANENT ATTITUDE.”**

-Martin Luther King Jr.

