



INSTITUTE FOR
PERSONAL
GROWTH

Judith Clarke

Love is the Path to Healing

A new and exciting form of couples therapy is now being introduced to the Lesbian and Gay Community – IMAGO RELATIONSHIP THERAPY. Because this groundbreaking and successful therapy has previously only been available to heterosexual couples, a handful of dedicated therapists have worked hard to expand and incorporate its principles for Lesbian and Gay couples. It is the belief of these therapists that the couples of our community are entitled to find the help that their relationships so richly deserve.

For lesbians and gays, relationships are extraordinarily problematic. We carry the burdens of living in a homophobic society and are further troubled by our own internalized homophobia. Same-sex couples characteristically merge and fuse. Often couples feel the strain of having to live closeted or isolated lives and maintaining different identities outside the home.

IMAGO RELATIONSHIP THERAPY (I.R.T) is a form of couples-therapy innovated by Harville Hendrix, Ph.D., who wrote the very popular book *Getting The Love You Want: A Guide For Couples*. It is a synthesis and extension of many meaningful psychological theories concerning primary love relationships, and includes behavioral and spiritual components. Hendrix combined theory with powerful techniques, giving couples very specific skills to learn. His work is based on the notion that the purpose of a relationship is to finish childhood business. Further, it is in the context of a relationship that the damage of childhood will be repaired, so we can be healed.

The following is a description of the basic premises of I.R.T: "Imago" is Latin for image. Our "Imago" consists of a blueprint deep in our unconscious mind of the positive and negative traits and characteristics of our primary caretakers (usually our parents). This Imago is a map which guides us in our selection of whom we need to have as a life partner someday. We partner with someone who matches up with the composite image of our primary caretakers. As our parents are the ones who wounded us, it is only they who can heal us. However, our parents cannot or will not heal us literally in this way; it needs to be a primary love partner who matches their traits.

Because of our caretakers, childhood is often a perilous journey and impacts on how we hook up with a life partner. We are born perfect, whole, and complete; in a state of bliss and relaxed joyfulness. Through the childhood journey, as we grow and develop, we are wounded in one or a number of the following areas: feeling, action, thinking, or the body. This happens in early nurturing and socialization stages and creates wounds which are the lost, cut-off parts of ourselves and leaves unmet needs. We carry these inside and they dictate who we will be attracted to and select as a partner for a relationship.

This partner will be someone we believe has those lost parts of ourselves and who we think will allow us to feel whole and complete again. We fall in love with someone believing we will now get all the goodies we didn't get while growing up. Thus, we experience the excitement generated by the romantic stage of a relationship. Romantic Love is the door to a committed relationship and is nature's way of connecting us with the perfect partner for our eventual healing.

Because of early childhood wounding, our unconscious mind is not content to avoid situations in which these wounds occurred. Therefore we find or re-create situations similar to those we've experienced in the past, in order to have a different outcome and be healed. As we are wounded and in search of healing, we only fall in love with a person who has character traits similar to those of our caretakers who originally

wounded us.

A while into a committed relationship, the partners become disillusioned with one another and with the system they have created. They feel this wonderful person they picked and feel in love with is not meeting their needs or making them feel whole - and that they've been cheated or fooled. Dissatisfaction leads to fighting, criticizing, competition, and manipulation - a struggle for power. Inevitably our love partner feels incompatible with us and least able to meet our needs and most able to wound us all over again. Couples engaged in the power struggle usually choose one of three paths:

Separate

Remain in a HOT relationship - where it is "till death do us fight"

Remain in a COLD relationship where it is "till death will I never show my heart and feelings again"

The Power Struggle is necessary, for imbedded in a couple's frustrations lies the information for healing and growth. The resolution of the power struggle is what couples therapy is all about. Transforming the relationship into one of mutual healing is the goal of couples therapy. Because the love relationship surfaces the deepest wounds of childhood, it is also only in this context that these wounds can be healed. Before this can happen, both partners need to realize and subsequently change behaviors that wound their partner.

The first two stages of the union, "Romantic Love" and the "Power Struggle," are engaged in at an unconscious level. Our unconscious mind chooses our partner for the purpose of healing childhood wounds. The goal of Imago Relationship Therapy is to align our conscious mind (which usually wants happiness and good feelings) with the agenda of the unconscious mind (which wants healing and growth). Thus the goal of therapy is to assist clients to develop conscious, intimate, committed relationships.

There is a fourth path for couples in the power struggle to choose - unfortunately many do not, or are unaware of such an optimal choice. The path is a commitment to this process which allows you to unlock important information about you and your partner. There is information in frustrations about your partner's unmet childhood needs and a lost part of yourself. This is a gift that helps you find out things about one another you never knew before.

This transition cannot take place through insight alone. Specific skills and processes are necessary that need to be practiced daily to shift us from having an unconscious union to a conscious union.

Imago work focuses on techniques to help see each other's wounded child. When empathy and compassion are generated, the relationship can never be the same again - only better.

It takes two to five years of regular work (not necessarily therapy) to develop a conscious partnership which will bring you the relationship of your dreams - that is, one of safety and passion.

The two-day couples workshop called 'Getting The Love You Want Workshop' is a very powerful way to start this journey toward developing a conscious primary love-relationship. The workshop structures a weekend process for lesbian and gay couples utilizing the knowledge about how couples hook-up and rework their childhood

wounds. The workshop teaches important communication techniques and five processes to bring you this special relationship.

Imago Relationship Therapy has the power to transform couples' previously negative, unsatisfying, disillusioned relationships into ones of caring, support and nurturing. Partners will find their connection to one another revitalized, nourished, and fulfilling. Most importantly, it allows love to flow again, and love is the path to healing.