Take Charge of Your Life

or

Someone Else Will

A guide to maintaining balance between positive self-worth and mutually satisfying relationships

BY

RAYMOND S. SHOCKI JR, PhD, LMFT, LCSW

"We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty."

- Maya Angelou

Dedication

This book is dedicated to those who sometimes say the wrong thing at the wrong time but try to make corrections. It is dedicated to those who unintentionally hurt another person by word or deed but try to make amends. It is dedicated to those who regularly make mistakes but try to get it right next time. It is dedicated to those who often don't understand but always try to learn anew. It is dedicated to all those who fall but pick themselves up and continue to try to be a better person. This book is dedicated to us all.

Contents

Acknowledgments

Acknowledgment and appreciation are expressed to those professionals who have gone before and those who are currently in the field, as well as those many patients who have been both my pupils and my teachers. I also fully recognize and thank those persons who throughout my journey in this life, who have been instrumental in getting me back on track in my personal and professional development.

Preface

During my thirty plus years in the field of behavioral health, I have never ceased to be amazed by the mind's ability for self-deception. Seemingly rational human beings engage in thoughts about themselves and the world around them, in ways that defy logic. Yet, in their minds, their views are perfectly logical. Time after time patients come to my office professing to want positive change in their lives. More often than not, however, they insist that the reasons for their problems lie not in themselves but rather with other people—spouses, significant others, even humanity in general. These individuals report that they are misunderstood, that their partners behave inappropriately toward them, and that if their partners understood "reality" as they do, their relationship would be fine. If one were to suggest that these patients may, in part, have some responsibility for their problems, they would respond in disbelief. They would claim, "You just don't understand," or asking, "Why should I be the one to make any changes when the other person is clearly in the wrong?"

In reality each person in a relationship brings with him or her conditioning derived from a number of factors that include societal norms, religious affiliation, nationalities, family values and upbringing, gender, emotional and psychological underpinnings. These factors in turn influence perceptions people have of themselves and how they view and relate to others in their world. These perceptions can become "truths" by which they live. When they limit these as the only "truths" there is, it becomes easy to view the world in dualistic terms as black or white, right or wrong. They forget that others have their own 'truths" which are very different but perceived as equally valid. When these perceptions become entrenched in the psychic, any other "truth" that does not conform is met with tenacious resistance. It is a no wonder that differences in others become sources of conflict and necessitate the other change in order to bring back calmness in ones' life.

Harville Hendrix, in a presentation to doctoral students on Imago Relationship Therapy, July 7, 2008, illustrated the difficulties couples have in negotiating resolution to conflicts brought about by each having different views on how the world should function. This lack of ability he reported results in over 50 percent of first-time marriages ending in divorce. He goes on to report that the divorce rate increases to over 70 percent in second-time marriages. The good news is that only a little over 30 percent of third marriages end in divorce. Who would willingly want to go through the emotional and financial pain of two divorces in order to get to a successful third marriage?

The right versus wrong mentality is not limited to two people in a relationship. Take for example our two party political systems. Republicans and Democrats both take polarized positions, viewing the other party as unenlightened. Can one party be so right and the other so wrong? The right versus wrong perception of reality also manifests in countries. The Israelites and the Palestinians, for example, are engaged in an intergenerational struggle in which both tenaciously consider themselves right. Can one side be so right and the other side so wrong?

In this book, I will not try to solve the country or the world's problems. I will instead concentrate on the individual in the context of a relationship with another person. Though the book deals with couples, it is equally applicable to individuals who, although not currently in

intimate relationships, certainly come in contact with people every day. Individuals in any life situation find themselves struggling when relating to others. As a result, they feel inept or inadequate, reinforcing their own unhappiness. However, viewing relationships as vehicles for personal growth can go a long way in overcoming the barriers to taking charge of one's own life.

The purpose of this book is psycho-educational in nature. In it, there are current theories in psychology that blend with strategies and techniques the reader can use for improvement of self and relationships. It can be read by itself or in conjunction with ongoing counseling. It can also serve as a guide for practitioners working with individuals and couples in relationships.

The book will address the emotional and psychological tug of war that evolves in many relationships. It will show how understanding and working with the unique qualities within oneself and the other person is far more beneficial than engaging in emotional power struggles that leave both feeling misunderstood and frustrated. It will focus on developing the ability to be in charge of oneself instead of allowing others, living and dead to be in charge.

The book will benefit individuals and couples willing to take a hard look at the origin of behaviors that are no longer useful to them. It will examine why, despite being dysfunctional, these behaviors are constantly repeated. It will also examine how a greater likelihood of emotional success in life can emerge through the interdependency of personal development and relational satisfaction.

Consistently using the strategies and techniques in the book will help the reader take charge of his or her life and toward better relationships. Though acquiring knowledge is important, putting that knowledge into practice is equally important in achieving success. It's like the old joke about the man looking for directions in New York City. He goes up to another man and asks, "How do I get to Carnegie Hall?" The second man answers, "Practice, practice, practice."

This work compiled in this book is from research done by various theorists as well as from years of working with individuals and couples who struggled to achieve personal and relational satisfaction. It is not offered as a substitute for the body of work done by others, but rather is an additional tool in one's arsenal for achieving the goal of being in charge of one's own destiny.

—May 1, 2013

Introduction

Power, sought after, yet rarely understood. Countries, societies, groups, members of families, couples all attempt to exert power, either overtly or covertly, over another. In dysfunctional relations it can be witnessed covertly through attempts at manipulation, passive aggressive behavior or negative judgment of others. Overtly it can manifest itself by emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse of another. It becomes a cycle that goes nowhere positive, resulting in unhappiness and a lack of fulfillment.

Attempts to change the cycle by taking personal charge of oneself is commonly met with resistance. There is a natural tendency to avoid feeling uncomfortable. Therefore, it is not surprising that individuals will go to great lengths to avoid the discomfort of making changes. This is true even if they are in highly dysfunctional and destructive relationships. To avoid the discomfort of change, people will rationalize their behavior, blame others for their unhappiness or even continue to victimize themselves. They fail to realize that feeling initially uncomfortable with a positive change in behavior reaps benefits that can never be derived by continuing the same dysfunctional behavior that brings the same negative results. This book talks about finding ways to risk the necessary changes that will result in achieving personal power in small step by step increments.

Each chapter will create small building blocks that will enable the reader to take greater personal responsibility for shaping a more positive sense of self and more productive relationships. The process of reading this book will lead to a greater understanding of the influences that stifle growth and how to map out a different destiny. It will show how becoming more authentically oneself changes the dynamic of one's relationships. Conversely, making the necessary changes in one's relationship further changes oneself in a positive way. This book will illustrate that achieving personal fulfillment is not derived by having power and ultimately charge over others, but through achieving the personal power that comes from being in charge of oneself.

The case examples in this book illustrate couples struggling with various relational and personal issues. The reader will understand that though there are many influences that impinge on how a person thinks and behaves, there are ample opportunities for positive changes a person can make to break those destructive patterns. The purpose of this book is to take charge of one's own life and destiny. This is in spite of outside pressures to live otherwise.

Part I

Factors that impact self-perception and the nature of relationships

1

Historical and contemporary influences on the role of the sexes and the nature of relationships

> *"I can't help it. I was drawn that way."*
> —Jessica Rabbit, in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*

Throughout the ages, society has struggled to understand how people can effectively relate to one another and how they can experience greater relational success. This is nowhere more dramatically illustrated than in the relationships between men and women.

There is no simple reason for the struggle to understand and be understood. Ingrained beliefs about men and women dating back many years influence how they deal with each other and the world around them. Each of their unique behaviors is influenced by societal changes, religious beliefs, family dynamics, genetic predispositions, neuron wiring and individual upbringing. Additionally, the media, especially through advertisements that portray how men and women should think and believe, influences how they behave in real life. All this becomes more emotionally charged when the relationship between a man and a woman is an intimate one. With all these influences, it's no wonder that true intimacy is so elusive in society today.

In order to have successful relationships, it is important for couples to understand how they got to where they are in the first place. This chapter examines the influences, both past and present, that impact the way couples relate to each other today. Because of these influences, it is not unusual for some of the following beliefs to be held up as truths. They include:

- Women are the weaker sex.
- Women are too emotional.
- Men should lead, women should follow.
- Men act like children and need to be told what to do by women.
- A good man is hard to find.
- Men use women.
- Women manipulate men.

Truth or fiction? For many it doesn't matter. Perception becomes reality and these unsubstantiated beliefs are accepted in the daily interactions between men and women.

1. Societal influences throughout the ages

Where does all this repetitive behavior come from? Were individuals always like this? Is it in the genes? Is it truly normal and natural for couples to be at odds with one another? Was it ever any different? Interestingly, contrary to historical and modern assumptions, it hasn't always been "a man's world" as believed by many segments of society. At one time, women were seen as the Great Earth Mother, thus the universal power (Gimbutus 1982, reprinted 2007). Further, in her book Gimbutus reports archeological findings that reveal an egalitarian society where males and females coexisted without the specification of duties. She cites ample evidence of the existence of both animal and plant fossils that preceded the use of tools. Hunting alone, therefore, did not account for the sustenance of humans. Findings revealed that food gathered by women accounted for most of the family and group's sustenance. In fact, the plant material and small animals collected by women accounted for 70 percent of the tribe's diet. Men and women were interdependent, different but equal in their quest for survival. How did this change?

As societies evolved, small agrarian groups that were mutually dependent on one another for survival gave way to larger groups that conquered others for land, water, and resources. War replaced interdependency as the means of survival. Hence, men took on a more prominent role in these societies. This did not mean that men were better than women. What evolved, however, was the mistaken notion that men were innately superior to women. This mistaken belief shaped the way men and women related to one another.

Today, however, as the world shrinks, countries are being forced to relate to one another differently. War is viewed as generally not resulting in long-term benefit to either side in costs of lives and financial resources. The flow of massive information and communication world wide is bringing down long held barriers to more egalitarian societies. In spite of societal resistance, women's roles are changing and with them, the way men and women relate to one another.

In *Reflections on Anger: Women and Men in a Changing Society*, it has been noted that today's society may be more conducive to high levels of stress, tension, and potential anger than in the past (Reiser 2001). This is due, in part, to women striving for greater equality with men and attempting to overcome the barriers to such. In spite of these barriers, four out of ten women in American society today earn more than their mates. With the struggle for equality between the sexes, come unprecedented changes in behavioral expectations. This makes it impossible to draw on past experiences for guidance. Yet the past very much influences the present. To understand this current tension between men and women, Reiser further states that one needs to examine a variety of factors, ranging from historical, socio-cultural forces to interpersonal and psychological dynamics. With increasing equality, the potential for both intimacy and conflict has increased. Ironically, the very intimacy that equality fosters in terms of honesty and openness, also can lead to disagreement, with varied and opposing points of view. Once conflicts of ideas emerge, there is no simple resolution process available. Historically, societal norms bestowed authority on the male in the relationship. In our society today, authority is not automatically bestowed to the male. The power resources of the couple, though different, theoretically are equal. This being the case, different views can lead to power struggles.

Thus, people today find themselves in a strange social situation. Just and loving relations between women and men are emphasized more strongly than ever before. However, dissatisfaction, resentment, and frustration among women are increasingly widespread. Why? The answer in part can be found in the fact that today's gender roles have made previously tolerated behavior, exhibited by men, unacceptable. Increasingly, in today's society women want and expect to be treated as people of equal stature as their male counterparts.

Traditionally, society has valued men who are aggressive, successful, and self-reliant in relationships. These elements of the male role may have served men well in various social and physical situations in the past. However, when applied to male-female relationships today, they are destructive rather than beneficial. These traits encourage men to be self-centered, aggressive, domineering, condescending, and emotionally isolated. Some of these behaviors associated with masculinity may have invited admiration from women in the past, but today they are more likely to turn women off emotionally. Women still expect men to work hard and succeed, but they are also looking for sensitivity and understanding. It may be good to lean on a rock when one feels weak, but a rock does not invite intimate connection. Women, on the other hand, are expected to be attractive, attentive, and "superwomen." In this tradition, a woman is expected to do it all: be a mother, be a wife, keep her youthful shape, take care of the house and have a career. Such goals and expectations only generate tension, frustration, and guilt if not met.

For many, these traditional expectations of male-female roles can be confusing and seemingly contradictory. Women admire men's strength and competence but fear their power to control and dominate. Men, on the other hand, love women's gentleness and appreciate their receptivity but disparage them for being too emotional and overly sensitive. One way to correct these conflicting messages is to strengthen men's and women's sense of security and personal power. A woman who feels strong and competent within herself is unlikely to fear strength and competence in her male partner. A man who acknowledges his own gentleness and sensitivity is unlikely to belittle it in his female counterpart (Burr 2003).

Also, with a societal shift toward a need for more intimacy in relationships comes an assault on another one of the defining characteristics of our culture, which is an emphasis on individualism. In the extreme cases, these individualistic people can be led to pursue their own pleasures and dreams without a sense of obligation or commitment to others. To them, whatever is needed to achieve personal wealth, pleasure, or power is acceptable. In troubled relationships, this attitude manifests itself in egocentricity and unrealistic expectations of others. These people view their own feelings and needs as paramount in any given relationship without comprehending that others may have different needs that are equally valid. In these types of dysfunctional relationships, the results in power struggles where the possibility of negotiating differences turns into rivalry and competition (Reiser 2001). Obviously, these extremes are not conducive to mutually satisfying interdependent relationships. Creating a balance between individuality and mutuality is missed, resulting in emotional isolation rather than true intimacy.

3

2. The impact of religion on male and female roles

When we discuss how societal changes impact beliefs of male-female roles, we must look at the impact of the Bible on male-female behavior. We can begin by examining the creation story. According to the Bible, women are to blame for the "fall" of man. The King James Version of Genesis describes Eve's reaction to the fruit God has forbidden them: "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat" (Genesis 3:6). As a result of her actions, God punishes Eve and all women after her with the pains of childbirth and subjection to men. "Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shall bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Genesis 3:16). Today, this episode is subject to debate and various interpretations. It is believed by some that the biblical author was the product of his times and, thus, his interpretation of God's word was influenced by the values of Hebrew society during his time. What may have started out with benign intent has helped pave the way for centuries of misunderstanding between the sexes. This ultimately contributed to the erosion of open and effective communication between them.

When Christianity emerged, St. Paul, a celebrated member of the early Christian community, further reinforced male superiority and women's subordinate role in male-female relationships. Again, Paul was speaking as a man who was the product of his time. In I Corinthians 14: 34- 35, he declares, "Let your women keep silent in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also says the law. And if they will learn anything let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." Paul demanded that women should pray with veiled heads to indicate their continued secondary status to men who were not required to do so (I Corinthians 11:5). Paul's words, taken out of context, were used by male leaders in society over the centuries to reinforce their positions regarding the roles of men and women. Yet nowhere in the Bible does Jesus Christ state that women be held in a subordinate role in his discipleship. There are many mentions of women held as equals and in high esteem. Yet this vital part of Jesus' teachings has been marginalized or dismissed by many proponents of patriarchal Christian religions, thus allowing men to retain power at the expense of women. Here, the literal interpretation of scripture is used to maintain this illusion of superiority even today.

Case example #1

A couple came into my office for counseling. As a literal interpreter of the Bible, the husband had definite views on male-female roles within marriage. He saw his wife's role as a stay-at-home housewife, subject to him as head of the household. When the wife voiced a wish to go to college and become a nurse, the couple began to experience friction. He saw her as unchristian in her desire to pursue a life outside the home. He also viewed her quest for personal and professional growth as a ruse designed to locate men so that she could have an affair and leave him. After all, I his eyes, a woman couldn't be trusted.

His rigidity and literal interpretation of the Bible drove him and his wife further apart. His biblical misinterpretations only reinforced his need to control her. These beliefs masked

his feelings of inadequacy. His narrow views of biblical interpretations helped reinforce his resistance to change. He strongly rejected the idea that his wife may have a different set of beliefs about the world and her place in it. To him, biblical teachings clearly defined the nature of the roles between men and women. Adjusting his views was something he was unwilling to do. The idea that she may be a different interpretation of male/female roles was too difficult for him. It made negotiating a solution that worked for both impossible. His rigid view of the world made his wife the sole problem in the relationship. The couple eventually dropped out of treatment, with the wife finally filing for divorce. His insistence that she was wrong rather than just being different doomed the relationship. This exemplified of how misinterpretations of biblical intent can be misused to defend against change and reinforce how certain segments of men view women in today's society.

These ideas are not limited to the Christian religion. They are evident in some Orthodox communities, as well as with Moslem and Hindu sects. In these cases, religion is used to rationalize and sanction men to advance their own power over women. In far too many circles, religion has been a temptation for controlling others rather than reforming oneself. However, these old ideas are being challenged on all levels of religious institutions, and real change is beginning to evolve. As with any change, there comes forth strong resistance. However, perseverance and consistency makes slow and steady progress in breaking down skewed and limiting beliefs about roles of man and women. (Martin and Tesserof 1996).

3. Neuro-chemical and neuro-scientific influences that affect relationships

In some circles, it is theorized that genetic predisposition can have a deeper and stronger impact on people than society, religion, or even the environment. A genetic component is related to a variety of psychological and social phenomena, including alcoholism, forms of mental illness, antisocial behavior and sexual preference. Coupled with this is a theory that psychological differences between the sexes, as they relate to aggressiveness or nurturance, can be traced back to genetics. As a result, there is some thought that domestic violence in men who are physically, sexually, and/or emotionally abusive toward women is biologically driven. The danger in this line of thought is that it may encourage claims that "things have always been this way" or "this is the way men are". This implies that abusive behavior is unchangeable. It takes away the personal responsibility and self-determination that is critical in achieving lasting changes despite earlier programming (Burr 2003).

Burr theorizes that the sex hormones (androgen, progesterone, and estrogen) have a direct effect upon our thinking and behavior. For example, the mood changes that affect some women during their menstrual cycle are viewed as the result of changes in hormone levels in the blood. Others claim that hormonal changes do not affect mood. In my own practice, however, I have witnessed women going through deep depression just before the onset or during their menstrual cycle. This has been manifested in various ways from an increase in irritability to an increase in a dark depression. I remember one of my patients who would have thoughts of suicide just before the start of each of her menstrual cycles because of her deep depression. However, once her nurse practitioner prescribed Prozac, her mood stabilized, with her depression lifting and her suicidal thoughts ending. . It would be extremely difficult to convince such women of the theory that there is no connection between hormonal imbalance and mood swings.

We can go beyond hormonal differences and raise the issue of brain differences between men and women and how this may affect mood and hence behavior. There are some studies indicating a clear difference, which lends credence to this line of thought. More recent research studies indicate that anger may be triggered in the part of the brain named the dorsal anterior cingulated cortex (DACC). This theory postulates that this part of the brain recognizes an offense, registers the feelings generated by the perceived offense, and acts upon it. It goes on to state that this part of the brain is more active in men than in women. This may add to an explanation of how men differ in dealing with aggression than women (Martin and Tesser 1996).

Cognitive neuroscientists are also trying to understand the role the brain plays in more complicated emotional states. Empathy, for example, is one such state. Empathy is more than being nice or sympathetic. It is the ability to feel what another feels and to deeply understand another person's point of view. Feelings of empathy appear to be associated with higher levels of functioning in the frontal cortex of the brain. Theory has it that when this part of the brain is more fully developed, it is more likely that an individual can be truly open and understanding. Is the part of the brain that regulates empathy more readily developed in women than in men? Research scientists are studying how the brain development differences between men and women may influence how they deal with various feelings. If the results of such research discover a clear correlation between difference in brain development and ways of emoting, it could answer the question women ask of their partners; "Why can't you understand how I feel?"

In addition, during highly emotional states, feelings such as love monopolize a greater portion of the brain. Significant parts of the brain affect emotional perception, attachments, and bonding during the initial stage of love.   Because of this, Pelusi, a clinical psychologist, theorizes that during the couple's initial phase of romantic love, the part of the brain that governs reasoning, judgment, and fear shuts down activity. Men and women at this initial phase have a difficult time viewing each other as separate, uniquely different human beings. Instead, each views the other as very similar to himself/herself. That's why it's so difficult during these early stages of a relationship to discern and effectively deal with all the early warning signs. People at this point are prone to distort reality, minimizing potential problem areas and seeing only the positive behavior in the other person. The reasoning function of the brain in these cases filters out contrary incoming data about the other person and only reinforces cherished beliefs and desires. Therefore, if the relationship goes astray, the question is often, "How could I have been so blind? All the warning signs were there" (Pelusi 2009).

Burr (2003) on the other hand, claims the difference in male and female roles is the product of evolution. Her position is that as societies evolved into mostly hunter-gatherers. Men did the hunting and women stayed closer to home as care takers, occupied with nursing and rearing children. In such societies, socio-biologists argue, the sexual division of labor was highly functional. Women, encumbered by frequent pregnancies and the need to care for young children, would have been ill suited to hunting, which would also have endangered their offspring. Men being more aggressive than their counterparts were more successful at hunting and defending themselves and their families. It is theorized that men utilized the fight/flight response in hunting and passed on this adaptation to succeeding generations. Likewise, women, who were viewed as more nurturing caretakers passed on these adaptations on to future female generations. Thus, through the process of natural selection (survival of the fittest), a highly functional difference in the sexes produced and reproduced over generations.

The question is, "How functional is this way of relating to one another in today's modern society?" With a push toward a more egalitarian way of life, changes in the roles of men and women become necessary for optimal cohabitation. Even when changes are positive, there are elements of stress and distress.

The prehistoric "fight/flight" response worked very well during prehistoric times but can adversely affect people relating to one another in today's more egalitarian society. Before, the problem was choosing to either fight with or flee from a predator. Today, it is not so simple. Though there is no predator to deal with, the same mechanism kicks in when a person feels threatened. People, whose self-esteem, self-worth or public persona is threatened, may aggressively strike out or emotionally withdraw. Either way of dealing with conflicting emotions in relationships is not productive. Being able to explore more effective ways of expressing one's self is critical if relationships are going to work (Lamar 2010).

Neuroscientists, such as Antonio Damasio (2010), believe that the plasticity of the brain enables it to generate new neurons all the time. This allows the brain to be able to make a variety of adaptive changes. According to neuroscientists the brain, as it relates to behavior and change adapts in three basic ways. It can strengthen already existing behavior. It can modify existing behavioral patterns. Finally, it can accommodate new behaviors.

According to theorists, when a behavior is repeated, certain areas of the brain light up, emitting strong electrical- chemical signals as neurons in the brain. As the behavior is repeated over time, these neural pathways are thickened or reinforced. This makes it more likely that the behavior will reoccur in the future. When the behavior is repeated often enough, the brain increasingly performs it with less conscious thought. The brain will move the repeated behavior from the conscious to the subconscious mind. This works well when the person has mastered a behavior such as driving a car. Most of the minute details of the behavior are handled by the unconscious. The ability to perform certain behavior subconsciously can be a huge asset. The behavior is performed more easily and efficiently with increasingly less energy.

However, it does not serve the person well when the brain has subconsciously adapted to patterns that are dysfunctional. These are patterns learned from early childhood that are repeated so often that they become wired into the subconscious mind, apart from conscious awareness. Therefore, the reinforced pathways of neurons in the brain can also automatically affect behavior in unhealthy ways such as impulsive expressions of anger and hostility toward others.

As patterns of behavior become more and more reinforced into the subconscious mind, it becomes easier to perform. This is for better or worse. Unfortunately when the subconscious part of the mind is left in charge of this decision making, it can in problems. This is because the subconscious does no "real" thinking of its own. It cannot discern between healthy behavior such as embracing a loved one and unhealthy behavior such as taking drugs or eating junk food. This is no more evident than in relationships. People can engage in dysfunctional behavior learned from childhood. However, the brain cannot distinguish between behavior that is healthy and enriches lives and those that result in frustration and a sense of powerlessness. Thoughts, originating in the brain, reinforce behavior outside the person's conscious awareness. These thoughts result in behavior that may not be helpful but is perceived as normal. According to Damasio there are over 60,000 thoughts that enter one's mind a day. Of that number, there are relatively few that are perceived consciously.

A woman, who will be named Anne, came into my office reporting that her husband, "Bob" had left her and wanted a divorce. Anne was bewildered by this because they had had a great relationship in the beginning. Though Bob had exhibited warning signs in the beginning of the relationship, Anne dismissed or minimized them because she loved him and they had so much fun together. However, things changed when she became pregnant and they had the responsibilities of a new house. Bob began staying out with his friends at all hours of the night, resumed smoking pot, which he had discontinued when they were first dating. He also was spending an inordinate amount of time at his parents' house because he was no longer holding down a full-time job.

Bob finally told his wife that he wasn't suited for marriage and that being with her was no longer what it used to be. In spite of this crushing blow, Anne still longed for the man she had first met. The problem that she failed to realize was that Bob utilized fight/flight response by fleeing from the problem instead of discussing them at the onset. In Bob's case, he found the responsibilities of parenthood and married life too threatening to face and deal with appropriately. The new responsibilities of parenthood threatened a way of life that his mind felt was most comfortable. Anne, on the other hand, taking on age old female role of caretaker, was able to adapt to the responsibilities of parenthood and married life.

Bob began to become aware that fleeing from his emotions and marriage would risk permanent loss of his relationship with his wife and adversely affect his relationship with his child. It was when he realized that fighting or fleeing was not effective, that he explored the possible alternative of someplace in between. This could not happen without both Bob and Anne examining long held beliefs and coping patterns that no longer worked in a more egalitarian relationship. Bob needed to risk making small changes by risking getting in touch with the needs that he had long suppressed and fled from. Beginning to risk expressing those needs to Anne without prejudging them or her was necessary in order to make this marriage work. Bob needed to avoid running from the responsibilities of an intimate relationship. Anne needed to avoid falling back into the sole role of caretaker and balance it with viewing herself as having legitimate needs that have a right to be fulfilled. In addition, both Bob and Anne needed to view themselves as equal partners with all the rights and responsibilities therein. Through counseling, they were able to learn to be open and honest about their needs and to appropriately negotiate with each other in order to get those needs met..

4. The influence of literature and the media on how the sexes are viewed

We find abundant evidence of stereotyped roles for men and women in literature. Past literature has many examples of males being more dominant, holding positions of power in the household. Men were portrayed as not emotionally invested in relationships, with little expected of them in the area of intimacy. On the other hand, women were portrayed to be emotional and delicate, more suited for the role of caregiver for the children and household, and accepting of "the way men were." These repetitive written messages have reinforced beliefs that influenced the way couples relate to one another. Fortunately, this stereotype is beginning to be challenged in literature and motion pictures today.   However, there is much to be down to break down the

barriers to a more egalitarian society. Coupes still, in some quarters, make excuses for inappropriate behavior. Often women want to know how they can be more of what their mates want them to be, thus reinforcing the unequal roles of men and women. For far too many women these misconceptions are internalized as truths and accepted as such (Kalbeisch 1995).

There are also examples in contemporary media that reinforce this double standard in relationships. These examples include former President Bill Clinton's relationship with White House intern, Monica Lewinsky. His wife, Hillary, although angry at his behavior, ultimately "stood by her man." When John Edwards admitted to cheating on his cancer-stricken wife, Elizabeth, he rationalized that the cancer was in remission at the time. In spite of this public humiliation, his wife did not immediately terminate the relationship. It was not until the former senator publicly admitted to fathering a child outside of his marriage that his wife separated from him. "Law and order" New York State governor Elliot Spitzer was forced to resign his position after it came to light that he used the services of a high-priced call girl. He resigned publicly with his wife silently by his side. The list of examples in which the media highlights a clear difference in the way the sexes inappropriately behave while I relationships is exhaustive. Unfortunately, in some cases, this behavior is cynically expected. These outmoded images portray men's dominance over women while their partners are portrayed as long-suffering victims, sitting passively by, while "their men sow their oats."

Literature and the media portray men and women in stereotypical roles that are counter to a more natural, egalitarian form of experiencing a relationship. However, they sometimes provide insight into the dynamics of relationships as well. A character in the classic movie *Cool Hand Luke* voices a key factor in the breakdown of relationships when he says, "What we have here is a failure to communicate." Far too often, men and women are fixated in their own "reality" and refuse to believe that there may be a "reality" perceived by their partner that is different from their own. To be open to the possibility that a different "reality" may be equally as valid is resisted. Hence the results are a "failure to communicate." They are like the couple in a scene from the 1977 movie *Annie Hall*. In it, a couple is asked how often they have sex. The man complains, "Hardly ever! Three times a week." The woman rolls her eyes and replies, "Constantly! I'd say three times a week." Each has different interpretations of the same reality, yet they never talk about them or attempt to negotiate a resolution of their differences. Instead, they report to want open communication and yet tenaciously hold onto stereotypes promoted in part by the tabloids and other forms of the media. Repeated messages reinforce behavior that keeps people from getting what they profess to want. The closeness and intimacy desired by the vast majority of couples is circumvented by a long history of repeated distorted messages that become internalized as "truths" people live by. Literature and the media add to perpetuating these limiting perceptions. In many cases they distort the roles of men and women, placing them in rigid boxes that become acceptable norms. As a result, many people derive their beliefs in the nature of relationships from those portrayed in the media and literature. (Galician 2004).

Case example #3

A woman, we will name Helen, came into my office complaining that her marriage had fallen apart and her husband, Bill, had left her. Bill was a womanizer, and was often out with his friends all hours of the night gambling and drinking. He had even told her prior to the marriage that he wasn't the marrying kind and that she should accept it.

In spite of this, Helen was reluctant to put pressure on Bill throughout their marriage, hoping he would somehow see the light and become the responsible husband and father she knew he could be. In further questioning, it became clear that she had been a romanticized view of the world where things turn out well in the end. While she was growing up, her father had a drinking problem and was in and out of jobs. In spite of this, her mother stayed in the marriage, patiently waiting for her husband to come to his senses. After twenty-five years he gave up drinking and began to turn his life around. For Helen, the romantic ending held true for her parents. Movies and romantic novels reinforced these beliefs. She firmly believed that true love would win out in the end. Her husband didn't subscribe to the same set of beliefs about relationships.

Bill's belief system was quite different. He was coddled during his upbringing by his mother and sisters. In addition, his outlook on life was warped by the media: by so-called reality shows that portray women as subservient to men. He was greatly influenced by the Playboy Advisor, Penthouse Forum, *and the* Sports Illustrated *bathing suit issues, as well as the musical lyrics and by TV ads of his day. These outside influences helped reinforce his perception of women and made achieving a responsible relationship that much more difficult.*

Through counseling, Helen was able to understand that as long as she was committed to the unrealistic expectation of her husband becoming what he didn't want to be, she was doomed for failure. She was eventually able to develop an improved sense of self and slowly adjust her belief system give up on many of the outmoded beliefs she grew up learning at home and from the media. She modified the beliefs that were misplaced and no longer worked for her. She painfully came to the realization that her husband was not going to be what she wanted him to be. In taking responsibility for her own happiness, she was able to start her life anew.

5. Male and female roles in economic terms

To many, the strong influences of the women's liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s signaled the beginning of an era in which men and women's rights were recognized and legitimized both their business and personal lives. Legislation was enacted as a result of the movement. They included The Equal Pay Act (1970), The Sex Discrimination Act (1975), and the setting up of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC). These laws all contributed to the belief that inequalities between men and women have been addressed. Yet, even though the government had attempted to pass legislation that would promote equality, it could not regulate the bias in peoples' minds that continue to affect their behavior today (Burr 2003).

Subtle social norms that occur in the workplace illustrate this bias. For example, in many mixed-gender business groups, men are more prone to interrupt and offer direct requests and statements, whereas women are less likely to interrupt and are more likely to be interrupted. Women are more likely to make indirect requests and to give more conversational support to other speakers. However, if women are more vocal in a mixed-gender group, they are apt to be viewed by their male counterparts as aggressive, castrating females. On the other hand, those women who are quiet in the same mixed-gender group refer to the more vocal men as aggressive, controlling and ego-centric. These differences, whose existence is often denied, illustrate how, in spite of legislation, past societal programming continues to reinforce long standing bias that influence relationships.

Traditionally, women have been much less likely than men to have access to well-paid and secure employment. This however is slowly changing with four out of ten married women earning more than their husbands. In 1979, 2.5 percent of women held executive management positions in large corporations. Thirty years later, in 2010, over 55 percent of women held these positions. In spite of this, in many quarters, women still lag behind men in salary and other compensation for the same positions. In relationships, money can be a powerful tool used by many men as a way of controlling women and keeping them in the relationship. Ultimately, this leads to a relationship that is dysfunctional and mutually dissatisfying. Control of the wealth by men can create a potential barrier to relationships that place women in subservient positions.

In addition, too often women continue with more of the domestic responsibilities even while they work full time. This can lead to feeling unappreciated, alone and taken advantage of. It is not unusual for a woman to work all day, come home, prepare supper, help the children with their homework, get them ready for bed, prepare lunches for the next day, throw in a load of wash, and straighten up the kitchen before being able to sit down and relax. In the meantime, a man, claiming to be tired after a hard day at work, may be on the computer or zoning out watching television. Feeling taken for granted, often leads to frustration and anger on the part of the women in the relationship. Legislation alone does not result in the breaking down of these outmoded, engrained beliefs about male-female roles. Women, fully realizing that they are equal partners, need to articulate what they need from their partners and negotiate getting those needs met. They must resist the temptation to think, "He should know what to do without being told." This line of thinking tends only to reinforce the old, nonproductive ways of interacting. To change this self defeating cycle, women need to take better care of themselves by being more proactive in getting their needs met, rather than reactive in thinking their partner knows what they need without having to be asked.

On the other hand, it can be argued that men are also adversely affected by the economic terms in which society views them. In spite of equal work for equal pay laws, men are still viewed in many quarters as the breadwinners of the family. Because of societal influences, they often do not take advantage of opportunities to become more involved in child rearing. As a result, many of these societal influences adversely affectly men fully developing their capacity for intimacy. Men, who derive great enjoyment in spending time with their family and would like to spend less time working overtime and/or on weekends, are given the message by their employers that work is more important than ones' personal life. Unfortunately this line of thinking is becoming more prevalent for women in the workforce as well. Here again, economics and the workplace, in spite of the law, can adversely influence the nature of relationships today (Burr 1998).

Today, a substantial proportion of couples spend most of their waking hours apart. But women's and men's lives are becoming increasingly intertwined again as more and more women join men in the labor force. Both sexes are affected by changes in the workforce and must adjust. In a society where employers are forbidden to discriminate against women, yet consistently do not afford women the same opportunities that are provided to men. Changes in society have also made it increasingly difficult for men to be the sole breadwinners, thereby changing their roles at home and in the workplace. Although this new situation works toward equalizing resources between men and women, it can also be a significant source of tension and anxiety. Too many men (and some women) still view women's advances on economic, political, and intellectual fronts as an invasion into an area that has traditionally been reserved for men (Reiser (2001).

6. The nature of relationships: Fact versus fiction

The question remains, "Is there truly a difference between the sexes besides obvious physical characteristics?" The answer is yes and no. Basic needs, such as being accepted and valued, warts and all, may be the same for both. However, ways of getting those needs met may be very different. Research into whether or not there is a predisposed difference between the sexes continues at a fierce pace with no final, clear resolution.

As stated previously, women and men differ in their emotional capacities, with women finding it much easier than men to establish intimate relationships and to talk about their feelings (Kalbfleisch 1993). Men are viewed as more resistant to such expressions of emotion and are seen more as concrete-thinking problem solvers. Women are viewed as more abstract, wanting to be heard, understood, and empathized with, rather than automatically looking for concrete answers from their partners. A man's concrete, problem-solving nature is no more evident than when he claims to show love by working hard, bringing home a paycheck, and buying his mate things. On the other hand, a woman looks for more abstract signs of love in spontaneous acts of kindness without sexual intent and men showing them basic thoughtfulness and understanding.

William Farrell (Farrell,1988) challenges some of the stereotypes portrayed by men and women. In his book, Farrell reports that men at times want to express to their partners their fears and insecurities. Women, on the other hand, may feel uncomfortable when their partners reveal their fears and uncertainties. Men are viewed as strong and protectors by years of programming. As a result, many women will minimize their partner's expressions of insecurities. Many women can accept and even welcome vulnerability in their mate. However, being insecure can be threatening to women who accept the societal view of men as strong and self assured. In order to maintain this illusion, it is not unusual for men to act aggressively when their poor self esteem is threatened to be exposed. They dare not admit to not being what they believe society and their mate expects them to be. The fear of rejection is too great.

Are the differences described innate or the result of years of ingrained messages internalized since early childhood? I would venture a guess that they are both. Opening up and talking about these differences is a big first step and a big risk for couples. Change of any kind makes people feel uncomfortable. This will be especially hard for those men who crave closeness but do not know how to show it in ways that women understand.

This ongoing struggle between men and women is all too common for those who come for counseling. Often the chief complaint is the breakdown in communication. Many women view their mates to be no longer interested in listening to them. Men, on the other hand, are often bewildered by their mates' dissatisfaction. They view themselves as being responsive but unclear as to what their mates want. The women respond by stating that their mate should know what they need without having to be told. The results are they either become overtly argumentative or distance themselves emotionally (fight/flight response). Both end up feeling frustrated and unloved by the other.

In the pluralistic society of today, the roles of men and women become blurred and confusing at times. Couples attempt to reconcile these conflicting messages by becoming entrenched in behaviors learned from their past. However, what worked in the past does not

necessarily work in the present for them. The results are that there is a constant struggle to balance the complexities of modern life and relationships with underlying influences of past experiences. It is safe to say that the impact of these influences in daily interactions between men and women is significant indeed. Regardless of the influences, be they prehistoric, genetic, societal or cerebral, it does not take away the personal responsibility in determining one's destiny. As adults, people can take personal responsibility for change. For in changing themselves, they stand a better chance in changing the dynamics of the relationship.

7. Building blocks for change

In examining change, because of the uniqueness of each person, "one shoe doesn't fit all." This is both exciting and problematic. It is exciting in that a person can tailor what has been learned to fit the uniqueness of the individual. On the other hand, it can be problematic in that there is no simple formula that can be followed by all people in all cases. Many different roads can lead to the same outcome. Finding out what works best for each person in achieving and sustaining a healthy relationship though difficult at first, is well worth it in the long run.

An important first step is a becoming self aware. As has been stated throughout this chapter, there is a lot that goes into how the persons perceive themselves as unique individuals and as persons within relationships. Couples typically base their perceptions in terms of internal messages about themselves and the world around them. They rarely question these internal messages for accuracy. They are merely accepted as fact even though they may not bring forth positive outcomes. Self reflection, in this case, means the ability to be aware of patterns in one's behavior that are repeated and which bring forth maladapted results. This is normally resisted at first because it is easier to identify what needs to be fixed in the other person rather than taking a closer look at one's own behavior that may need adjusting.

It is natural for people to want change quickly. Therefore to begin with self awareness may seem futile. However, for change to be lasting, it must occur with small building blocks. This initial first step is doable, with minimally discomfort. Self awareness will help identify what patterns work and what do not. This will help identify what needs to change. Consistent self awareness can go a long way in producing positive changes in one's life. Consistency and patience are good indicators of commitment to change (Weeks and Treats 2001). Commitment can mean the difference between surface changes and deep, long-lasting transformation. There may be initial resistance due to subconscious programming. However, consistency can mean improved feelings about oneself as well as a deeper level of intimacy with one's partner.

To begin the process, it may be helpful to reflect upon the following questions.

➢ *Do you find that the roles taken on by you have been affected by outside influences both past and present?*

➢ *Of all the outside influences, which do you see as most influencing the roles played by you in relationships?*

➢ *Do you find the roles you play satisfying to you and helpful within the relationship?*

➢ *If not, why not?*

So often, the roles within a relationship are automatic and are acted out subconsciously, without much thought or examination. Beginning to examine and challenge the traditional way of being can be a stepping stone to a new way of being and relating to others.

Long histories of thinking and behaving in certain ways can not only blind people to self awareness but can also result in their ignoring early warning signs of trouble in relationships. For example, because of emotional wounds from early childhood, it's easy for people to have unrealistic expectations of themselves and their mate. They filter out potential problem areas, wanting only to see their current relationship fulfilling unmet needs and expectations. Therefore, from the beginning, it is critical that people to resist the temptation to view the initial stages of a relationship through "rose color glasses." Instead, they need to be aware of what their healthy and valued needs in a relationship are and how their potential mate measures up to meeting those needs. If not, there is a danger of unhealthy patterns learned in early childhood being repeated. Being alert to unhealthy patterns will assist in breaking the repetitive cycle of being dissatisfied with a life that goes nowhere productive. This also includes being aware of many of the outside influences addressed previously in this chapter. These outside influences reinforce maladaptive behavior take away from self determination.

2

Early relational dynamics and their impact on adult choices

". . . the sins of the father are revisited on the son."
—Exodus 34:6

Newspapers, magazines, and child psychology books often make a correlation between parental influences and child development. Parenting practices are viewed as influencing socioeconomic status, behavior health, and adjustment to adult life. When adults seek treatment for behavioral health and/or relationship problems, it is not unusual to trace it back to early parental influences. Even if the adult is one of brothers and sisters who develop problems, it is theorized that the parents treated him or her differently.

Plomin and McClearn (1993) cite that there are many psychologists, such as Albert Bandura, who theorize that even in normal family environments, growing up years can be negatively experienced, thus shaping children's development, as well as determine their adult futures. This means that even if the home environment is positive, there can be negative results if the child interprets it negatively. Their view of reality, rather than the reality itself, can shape children's view of themselves and the world around them.

These beliefs about early childhood development can affect personal responsibility and choices made throughout adult life. It is all too common for people to hold parents responsible for the choices they make and feelings they have in adulthood. This influences their view of the world and others in it, thus determines their behavior. It has been said that: "People often use others as their thermometers instead of becoming their own thermostats". In other words, people let their interpretations of others intent determine how they feel and react in any given situation. This is opposed to people taking personal charge of their own thoughts and behaviors. They trace views about others as stemming solely from parental influence. This does not imply that parents do not influence the way a child sees themselves. Parents do have enormous influence on how a child behaves, values themselves and what choices they make while growing up. However, influences on a child during these crucial years are multifaceted, coming from a variety of sources, including psychological and environmental factors. This theory ties into the previous chapter of multiple influences.

1. How parental influences define one's sense of self

It cannot be disputed that parents, as the primary caretakers, have influence on the children they raise. However, there is a growing theory, as reported, that children also create their own experiences from their environments. This challenges traditional beliefs about the

predominant influences of child rearing practices. Research over the past twenty years in the field of behavior genetics has called into question long held assumptions about the effects of parental behavior on children's development.

Behavior genetic researchers have shown that a variety of traits, including measures of intelligence, specific cognitive abilities and personality have as much variation within families as there are between families (Plomin and McClearn, 1993). Their theory is that children being reared in one family versus another make little, if any difference, in children's personality and intellectual development. This data suggests that the home life most parents provide for their children has few differential effects on the offspring. These researchers propose that children construct a reality from the opportunities presented to them while growing up. This constructed reality is viewed as having considerable influence on variations among children within a family that ultimately influences their adult outcomes. As adults, their perception of reality influences their views about the people they interact with and how they relate to those people. This is important when it comes to intimate relationships between men and women. Therefore, as people are bombarded by a wide variety of influences while growing up, the greatest impact comes from what they focus on repetitively and ultimately internalize.

It is important to point out here that the researchers are only talking about only those families systems were there are the normal supports present that assist in children's development. These variations within families are not viewed as crucial in determining the children's outcomes as adults and their ability to enter and maintain normal relationships.

However, it is viewed as different for children who grow up in environments that are not conducive to normal human development. Examples include children growing up in dysfunctional group homes or foster care homes. It can also include children who have been sexually, physically, and/ or emotionally abused as well as children trapped with unpredictable drug and/or alcohol dependent parents. Included are those children who are raised by vengeful, very mentally ill relatives. Being raised in emotionally and/ or abusive environments, does not support normal development for any child. Having no positive, emotionally supportive parent figures or being reared under terribly deprived circumstances have clear detrimental effects on child development, regardless of the child's genetic background. This is not to say that children raised in horrific environments are doomed for failure in life, with no chance for loving, nurturing relationships as adults. There are countless examples of damaged children who, as adults, reinvent themselves and turn their lives around in a healthy fashion. Oprah Winfrey is a prime example of one who experienced great emotional and sexual abuse while growing up. Yet today she has become highly successful in both her personal and business life.

Constructivists theorize that children determine their experiences by both their own individual unique characteristics and the influences of the environment they grew up in. Researchers in the field of cognitive, clinical, and social psychology base their theories on the impact of individual differences and their own interpretation and responses to their environment. They further theorize that, as adults, peoples' unique psychological pre-disposition and early perceptions of their environment can affect how they interface with others in relationships into their adult years.

Plomin and McClearn (1993) report different ways to view the subject depending on one's psychological leanings. They find that from a clinical psychological point of view, people differ in their emotional responses to situations based upon early upbringing, which in turn affects their behavior. For example, the emotional reactivity of an adult that was emotionally beat down as a child versus someone with a normal upbringing would be very different when faced with perceived punishment and reward. As a consequence, this internalized perception would shape their behaviors in those situations. Both emotional reactions, as well as behavior, would be readily governed by the perceived consequences of possible reward or punishment. This has great impact on how each would relate to another in relationships.

Plomin and McClearn go on to report that from the point of view of social psychology, one's own personal characteristics are affected by societal mores. This, in turn affects how one responds to another person. They find that people's way of relating each other is not only based upon one's own personal characteristics but also the influences of society. It is theorized that the nature of society even influences what are the attractive traits in a person and what is not. As a result, people who are judged to be physically attractive by society are more likely to be asked out socially, are more likely to be employed in certain jobs, and, once hired, are more likely to be promoted than others judged by society to be less attractive. I remember being told by a colleague that because he was tall and broad shouldered, he consistently found that he was provided service more quickly and graciously than those persons who are shorter. Studies found that people from an African country, dressed in native attire, are waited on more readily than African Americans dressed in American clothes. Societal stereotypes appear to exert a powerful influence on how people relate to one another. These societal stereotypes affect not only how people are perceived by others but also how they ultimately perceive themselves.

How people behave and relate to one another is influenced by many varied experiences. These include societal norms, psychological predispositions, and the impact of key individual relationships at various points in time. Adults, who had ordinary parents, were probably affected as children growing up in much the same way as they would have been if they had had super-parents. However, mixed messages and consistent tension experienced during those growing up years can result in damaged adults. Though a multitude of influences affect how people can feel about themselves, they do not define who they are as persons. People are not at the mercy of these influences. People can and do make conscious choices that helped them maneuver through the maze of conflicting messages. They can ultimately define who they authentically are as opposed to how society, in its various forms, define them to be. (Plomin and McClearn,1993).

Choices people make as children may no longer be functional for them as adults. They may have been left with scars that need to be healed or left with behaviors that need to be modified. People growing up in ordinary, less-than-perfect families, that are good enough, offer the capability to adapt to wide-ranging circumstances. The brain has a great capacity to make adaptation to new ideas very possible. Even when childhood abuse and trauma are experienced, a normal adult life with normal relationships is very possible. Adults, who experienced many of the pitfalls of life can and do become great successes. Another prominent example is President Barack Obama. He was born to a teenage mother, had a father who was absent, experienced a nomadic childhood, and was a black man raised by a white family. On face value, it looks like a

recipe for a disastrous adulthood. Yet here we have a man who is in a long-standing, stable relationship with two well-adjusted children and who is the first African-American president of the United States. Despite less than desirable life experiences people can have positive outcomes personally and within their relationships.

Yet all too often parents are blamed for not being there when they are most needed and are thus responsible for the dysfunctional choices made by their adult children. It takes a level of maturity to recognize that parents do the best they can with what they have to work with in raising their children. Many times they do not have the traits required to raise emotionally healthy and well-rounded individuals. Regardless of emotional wounds and scars from childhood, adults can reinvent how they will function in their world, including having a functional, mutually satisfying relationship.

2. Early life experiences impact adult relationships

When people think of early adult influences, they usually think of their birth parents. Thought is rarely given to other adults who are present at key points of development. This can even go beyond immediate family, though no one wants to minimize the role of grandparents in raising and influencing children. There can be no denying the tremendously positive influence Barrak Obama's maternal grandmother had on his life.

In addition, close-knit neighborhoods can provide informal support, guidance, and, in some cases, protection for children (Booth and Crouter, 2001). This can occur when parents know the parents of their children's friends. They then have the opportunity to observe a child's actions in different circumstances, talk to each other about the child, compare notes, and establish norms. I remember as a child being on my best behavior when at my friend's house. He lived next door to us and his mother and my mother were friends in close contact with each other. When his mother disciplined me at their house, it had almost as much influence on me as if it had come from my own mother.

Networks involving parents and teachers, religious and recreational leaders, businesses that serve youth, and perhaps even agents of the criminal justice system can influence children. Children can learn through observing other male-female relationships besides those of their parents. Deriving positive feelings about themselves from these experiences can positively affect the relationships they develop as adults.

Of course, these early life experiences with adults can also have a detrimental effect on children and the later life choices they make in relationships. Adults who have been abused emotionally, physically, and/or sexually by adults they can't trust. The results are adults who have trust issues. Far too many suffer with post-traumatic stress disorder and a deep fear of being hurt again. This adversely affects the ability to give and receive emotional intimacy in relationships with others. Conscious and consistent behavior changes can, over time, turn such negative experiences around into positive outcomes.(Plomin and McClearn, 1993).

The mind's ability to reinvent itself through consistent perseverance and continuous practice is amazing. Positive changes are possible regardless of age and prior programming.

18

3. Defenses learned in childhood repeat themselves in adulthood

Children are very dependent on the good will and protection of their parents and significant others when growing up. Far too many parents are emotionally ill-prepared to provide the necessary love and consistency their children so desperately need. Divorce or separation can result in the parents venting their hurt and anger against each other with the children caught in the middle. This leads to anxiety and confusion on the part of the children. Their parents serve as role models for dealing with conflict. This type of consistent dysfunctional role modeling will adversely affect how these children, as adults, will relate to their own significant others.

Patterns that repeat themselves in childhood become integrated into one's subconscious mind as adults. This dysfunctional pattern can be repeated from one generation to the next. Who hasn't heard it said in frustration and disappointment by a spouse, "I didn't want my relationship to be like the one my parents had, but I find myself doing the same things that I didn't like in them." Through repetition, children begin to identify with and take on many of the behaviors and traits witnessed on a daily basis while growing up. As previously stated, these in turn are repeated in their own relationships when they become adults. If the only relationship a child is exposed to is that of dysfunctional parents, then it is understandable that many of the behaviors identified will be integrated as one's own in adulthood. Couples need to be open to effective alternative ways of thinking and behaving. Because of years of previous programming, new, perhaps more effective behaviors will be initially resisted. However, with consistent repetition of the new behaviors, new patterns will, over time, become engrained into the subconscious mind.

In addition, while growing up, children learn to cope in various ways that will protect them from emotional and possibly physical pain. These are called defense mechanisms. These defense mechanisms helped them maneuver through the maze of confusing messages they received from parents and other adults. For many, these defense mechanisms continued in adulthood, affecting current relationships for better or worse. A few of the defenses learned from childhood and carried into adulthood are as follows (DSM-IV-TR, 2000). In looking them over, the reader may note certain defenses exhibited by their partner or even by themselves. Being aware provides opportunities to capitalize on what works and modify what doesn't.

Altruism is a common learned defense mechanism that can have a positive effect on the nature of a relationship if utilized properly. For example, when *altruism* is exhibited in a relationship, a person focuses on meeting the needs of the other person, receiving gratification vicariously from the response of the other person. This can have a positive effect on a relationship when practiced in balance with self-care. However, when an individual focuses predominantly on meeting the needs of the other person in the relationship without proper self-care or some type of reciprocity, it can lead to resentment and depression. Women particularly, can feel comfortable in the role of caretaker, but have difficulty identifying their own needs and appropriately having them met with in a relationship. However, this defense, used inappropriately, can be as troublesome for men.

**Case example #4**

     A patient named Phil, reported, as a child, that he took care of his chronically ill mother while his father was at work. He dedicated his early years to meeting the needs of his mother and indirectly, his father. As an adult, he would report that he got a great deal of satisfaction in altruistically helping others. However, he did very little for himself and as a result, had a great deal of difficulty with intimacy. In relationships, if a woman got too close and wanted to give to him, he didn't know how to handle it and would push her away. He knew how to give to others but didn't know how to receive from others for himself. Through treatment, he was able to learn that being sensitive to the needs of his partner in the relationship, while allowing himself to be given to, was equally as important and necessary.

     Phil was able to learn to bring balance into his life. He continued to maintain his caretaking attitude toward others while recognizing that it was okay and indeed healthy to take appropriate care of himself. He learned to feel comfortable in identifying and articulating his needs to his partner. He did this while being both sensitive to the needs of others and himself. Once this was established, he was then able to negotiate mutually agreeable resolutions to issues that affected both of them.

     Humor can also be an integral part of an effective relationship. Being able to allow humor to take the abrasive edge off of conflict or relational stress can go a long way to bring a couple closer together. However, when used inappropriately, humor can easily be interpreted as dismissive and disrespectful during a conflict. A patient reported that her husband did not take her seriously. She went on to report that whenever she expressed concern as it related to their relationship, her husband would joke about it. Though the husband appeared insensitive, he learned to use humor when trying to avoid the stress he thought he would experience if he tlked seriously about problem areas in their relationship. Humor can be a powerful tool to lighten up a difficult situation and make it more bearable. However, her husband needed to learn when to use humor and when to be empathic by carefully listening to what his wife had to say. Not doing so, only compounded the problem he was trying to avoid.

     Self- assertion is a defense learned in childhood when the home is open to self-expression. This can be an effective way of dealing with conflict and stress in a relationship. Here a person expresses his or her feelings or thoughts directly in ways that are not coercive or manipulative. This is a far cry from aggressively fighting with one another or silently withdrawing in quiet resentment. Either fighting or withdrawing is tactics that originated from the fight/flight response of pre-historic times. This was when the person faced with a real or perceived predator, would either fight or flee. Neither works today to bring about true intimacy. In between the two extremes is the form of self assertion. Taking the risk to reveal oneself in an open and honest way, while still being sensitive to the other person, is an optimal way of handling conflict that can lead to greater intimacy.

     With the defense of **sublimation**, the person deals with emotional conflict or stress by channeling potentially disturbing feelings or impulses into socially more acceptable behavior. An example of this would be channeling angry feelings into a healthy outlet of kick boxing.

Altruism, humor, self-assertion, and sublimation, when used properly, are positive/adaptive responses to potential difficulties that may arise in relationships. However, not all defenses learned in early childhood work for a person in adulthood. There are also negative/maladaptive responses that can act as a detriment to a healthy relationship (DSM-IV-TR (2000). It has been my experience in working with individuals and couples that *denial, displacement, and rationalization* are the most common maladaptive defense responses carried over into the relationships. *Denial*, for example, often occurs when one partner has learned to completely block out the reality of the stressful situation in the relationship and now behaves as if the conflict doesn't even exist. This is often frustrating to the other partner, who may be trying to deal with a conflict issue. Through the counseling process, it is often revealed that many of the partners who are in *denial* learned at an early age that certain stressful experiences were too painful to endure on a conscious level. As a consequence they pushed unpleasant feelings deep beneath the surface. It is not unusual for them to come from families that "swept problems under the carpet." In these cases, covert parental messages were given to children that stated that open expression of unpleasant feelings or thoughts were frowned upon.

Another common defense learned in childhood that can be no less dysfunctional in relations is *displacement*. This commonly occurs in relationships when one person has unresolved or uncomfortable feelings about someone from his or her past and transfers those feelings onto the partner. For example, one partner can have unresolved feelings of conflict about a parent or former mate that is unconsciously transferred to their current significant other. This becomes especially problematic when the other person has no clue that past conflict is being transferred into the present relationship.

Still another defense that is commonly acted out by couples in my practice is *rationalization*. Through this defense one or both partners in the relationship deal with the unresolved emotional conflict between them by concealing the true motivation for their behavior, even from themselves. This is usually done by an elaborate tapestry of reassuring and self-serving explanations that are wholly incorrect and not based in reality. However, the explanations serve to justify behavior in the eyes of one or both partners.

In the beginning of his book, *How To Win Friends and Influence People,* Dale Carnegie (2010) attempts to illustrate this very point by relating the story of a wanted fugitive surrounded by police in a tenement building in New York City in 1938. In the story the fugitive is in the midst of a heated gun battle. Earlier that day he had been in a parked car with his girlfriend. A policeman had asked him for identification. The man thereupon pulled out his gun and shot the police officer dead. He then quickly got out of his car, pulled out the gun belonging to the dead police officer, and loaded the contents into the police officer's body. While in the apartment of the tenement building, the man, himself shot by this time, writes a note not to say he is sorry for what he has done, but rather to question, in bewilderment, why a good man such as himself has been picked on and hounded by bad people so much. This story illustrates how, *denial, rationalization and displacement* can manifest itself in people.

People's minds are programmed from early childhood to perceive reality in a certain way. As a result other realities get filtered out of their awareness. An individual can run into problems when forced to interact with people who may have different realities or ways of perceiving the world. As a result, it is not unusual for these people to have unrealistic expectations about other

people. They expect the other people to change into what they want them to be as opposed to they themselves needing to change in any way.

One way of changing this endless merry-go-round that goes nowhere is to begin to consciously change the mindset. This means taking personal responsibility for changing oneself and the way one deals with others, rather than trying to change the other person. This can begin by moving from viewing the other person as wrong and needing to change. When one person tries to change the other, energy is wasted. Even if the other person is indeed wrong, unless that person sees this as accurate, trying to make that person change is a waste of time and energy. This wasted energy can be utilized more productively by improving oneself. This process can begin by viewing the other person as different, with a different reality base. This does not necessarily mean agreeing with the other person but rather understanding that the other person comes to the relationship with a whole set of different life experiences that result in different perceptions of the world. Finding common ground for a solution for both will minimize the power struggle of deciding who is right or wrong.

4. Past experiences influence present choices

All of us have been raised by less than perfect parents. We would like to think that they did the best they could with what they had to work with. Through repetition, messages given to children throughout childhood become integrated into the subconscious mind by the time adulthood is reached. These repeated messages influence thought and behavior well into adulthood. As a result, many adults do things that they do not want to do and don't do the things they want. This is because the subconscious mind is programmed to engage in a certain way of thinking and behaving. Though these influences may not serve them well as adults, they have become habits that are entrenched. When attempts are made to consciously change, the unconscious mind resists. This is because the subconscious mind's need for homeostasis. Change on the subconscious level means upsetting the homeostasis, even if behavior is no longer useful. This is graphically illustrated when each partner resists making the necessary changes but rather focuses on the other person's need to change. However, unless new, healthier strategies are learned and repeated often enough, there will be a tendency to consciously and subconsciously repeat those less than optimal behaviors throughout adulthood.

Being consistent in consciously making the necessary positive changes is easier said than done. In order to survive the tumultuous years of childhood and adolescence, people are programmed to think and behave in certain ways. Unfortunately their knowledge about themselves and about other people is based upon inconsistencies, gaps, and myths perpetrated by parents and other influential adults who had their own set of issues and distorted views of reality. In adulthood, these unconscious distortions are recipes for making poor choices in relationships. Trying to integrate these inconsistent messages from the past with the realties of the present can result in emotional stress, thus preventing good decision making.

In relationships there is a tendency to adopt short-term solutions to relieve the immediate emotional discomfort of changing. This is less stressful than searching for long-term solutions that can initially be more stressful. However, the short term solutions become more stressful in the long run by the continuation of patterns that done work in today's world. (Berglas and Baumeister, 1993).

People want to lose weight yet fail to consistently follow a viable exercise and healthy eating regiment. People want to get ahead at their employment yet fail to put in the necessary work to grasp the subject matter of the job. People want a healthy, mutually satisfying relationship yet settle for one that is unsatisfying. Time and again, people respond to the possibility of failure by deliberately sabotaging their own efforts. What they claim not to want ends up becoming a self fulfilling prophecy. Ultimately, their beliefs about themselves and their world exert a powerful influence on their goals and actions. (Christian, 2004)

This type of belief system does not originate in a vacuum. Far too many people exhibit self-defeating behavior by unconsciously identifying with parents and significant others who themselves were in dysfunctional relationships. They are blind to the fact that they themselves have made many of the same choices with similar outcomes. This is illustrated by the woman whose grandmother and mother had been married to men with addictions to alcohol and gambling, respectively. She follows the pattern by marrying a pot-addicted man who lives off her and is not invested in a successful relationship. She refuses to see how history is repeating itself by her making choices similar to those of her grandmother and mother. This woman fantasizes a happy outcome from a dysfunctional relationship ("if only he would give up pot, get a job, and become a family man"). She bases this on faulty information about relationships handed down to her by her grandmother and mother when she was a child.

She wanted a healthy relationship but had only the dysfunctional relationships of her grandmother and mother as role models. Where was her blueprint for a healthy relationship? Though she later was exposed to other realities about relationships besides the ones she grew up with, her upbringing distorted her judgment. Her resistance to new ways of experiencing relationships led her to make poor choices as an adult. In order to experience a different type of relationship, she needed to develop enough positive self-esteem to realize that she deserved more than what she was accepting. She needed to go through the initial discomfort of changing her beliefs about relationships that she learned from her mother or grandmother. She needed to view herself as a unique individual deserving of better things in life.

People may also stay in unhealthy relationships in order not to lose face. Concerns as to how they will be perceived by family, friends and /or coworkers often keep them in ill-advised relationships. It is amazing how many individuals are able to function more than adequately at work but locked into self-defeating behaviors in their personal lives. Though childhood influences impact our present feelings about ourselves and others, they in no way condemn us to be fixated there. As adults people can reinvent themselves. Past programming can be a source of lessons to be learned and not sentences to be lived out. In order to mature emotionally, adults need to give up behaviors learned in childhood that no longer work for them. With useful information, a clear vision, motivation, and perseverance, it is not only possible but probable that people will achieve positive relationships with themselves and others.

To quote the Apostle Paul, "When I was a child, I used to talk like a child, and think like a child, and argue as a child, but now I am an adult, all childish ways are put behind me" (1Corinthians, 13:11-12). Different ways of thinking about yourself as well as the relationships you are in, requires a willingness to take the leap into the unknown that is called "change." Attempting productive change does not automatically guarantee positive results. However, not making those necessary changes will guarantee the same old negative results.

People do not set out to fail in relationships. On the contrary, most seek success and fulfillment. However, due to past programming, they utilize misinformed, misguided ways of accomplishing their goal. These self-defeating behaviors, though ingrained, can be changed. As adults, people can exercise a freedom of choice that they never had as children. This does not mean that mere wishing will make it so. Due to years of repetition, it not as simple as saying "no" to behavior learned during childhood and young adulthood. Like attempting to change any habit, it will take work and perseverance to break those self defeating habits in order to achieve a more fulfilling lifestyle.

5. Building blocks for change

The first step in breaking the self defeating patterns is to develop a new awareness that can lead the way down the path of self-discovery and improved relationships. People can begin this by having a new awareness of what is going within themselves and in their environment. This requires listening and observing the nuances and patterns that were easily overlooked before. Listening also means trusting in the "gut" more and not overlooking those internal messages that can be a valuable asset. Writing notes about the specific issues that come to awareness during the course of the day can be of great value. This can help clarify the vision of what is truly wanted to achieve in life. Maintaining a journal can also help people generate ideas, obtain new insight, help formulate goals and measure success. Jotting down successes achieved during the day or new learning maximizes the likelihood of a successful outcome. These conscious choices will impact how the people view themselves and the relationships they are in. This will also result in new "programming" that is more in keeping with the life people want for themselves.

When changes are perceived as being enormous, it becomes overwhelming and paves the way for relapsing. Therefore taking small steps in moving toward the ultimate goal stand the best chance of long-lasting success. Reading the following questions can help with this process. After reading the following questions, respond with "Agree, Disagree or Uncertain" (A,D,U) and circle each response that most closely reflects thoughts at this point in time.

When reading these questions, ask how each pertains to your life. Jot down reflective responses to each of them. Are there any surprises or do your answers reinforce what you already suspect? These building blocks will begin the process of looking at where you want to go, and develop strategies for how to get there. They aid you to challenge outdated self-messages and non-effective behaviors and to begin the slow process of taking charge of your destiny.

1. Does my early childhood influence my behavior today? A D U

2. Does my relationship affect how I feel about myself? A D U

3. Do I listen to my "gut" enough? A D U

4. Do I continue to use the defenses I learned in childhood to cope with people today? A D U

5. Do I feel a sense of personal power? A D U

6. Do I feel controlled by others? A D U

24

In going through these questions, closely examine and reflect deeply on each one. Any statement that brings forth the answer of "Uncertain" may need further exploration that would shed light on reasons for the uncertainly and what needs to be done to make the answers specifically a "Agree" or "Disagree" In thinking about the reasons for particular answers for each, think about possible improvement strategies.

To the extent that you can begin to challenge old ways of thinking and behaving, then you will slowly develop the kind of personal power necessary to take charge of yourself moving in the right direction. As with anything new, it will take time and effort to result in a routine that actually becomes a natural part of one's persona. As you continue, you will gain knowledge and learn new strategies and techniques. Remember, you can not be solely responsible for making a relationship successful. You can only take responsibility for making the personal changes you need to make. If your partner is not as committed in taking the necessary steps to try to improve the relationship, then this may help you decide if you are in the right relationship.

3

"I love you. You're perfect. Now change."
<div align="right">- a patient jokingly speaking about her husband</div>

A. Basic conditions that affect choice of partner:

1. Appearance important at first;

Appearance for many is especially important during the early stages of the relationship and gradually becomes less important as time goes on. It's those initial impressions, both physical and behavioral, that are the longest lasting and the ones used as references when relationships begin to lose their luster. For better or worse, how a person looks and behaves are important in most areas of life, but at the beginning of a relationship, probably nothing counts more. Let us first look at physical appearance. This may seem superficial but it does have a significant impact. This does not take away from the old adage that "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." However, personal grooming and personal attire and "that look" take on new importance during the critical initial phase (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986).

Hatfield & Sprecher go on to write that men have this fantasy of dating a "ravishing woman". On the other hand, it is not unusual for women to fantasize dating a handsome as well as competent and tall man. In the end, fantasy is not the same as reality. However, when dating, there is interplay between both. The question is "What will people settle for if their fantasy doesn't match reality?"

In order to integrate the reality of what is versus the fantasy of what is not, the subconscious mind makes adjustments. People tend to rationalize away the incongruities of their fantasy in order to make the reality more acceptable. For example, if the prospective mate is not as attractive as one would like, then more attractive people may now be viewed as arrogant, aloof and self-indulgent. They may also be viewed as conceited and ego-centric people who would be too absorbed with themselves to be interested in others they may consider "average". "Handsome" men may be viewed as shallow lovers, expecting instant gratification and if they don't get what they want, they move on. They may be viewed as clueless as to work necessary to have a successful relationship. "Beautiful" women do not fare any better. They may also be viewed as shallow and self-absorbed. (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986)

As fantasy recedes into the background and reality sets in, the level of one's self-esteem has more influence on the type of people one is attracted to. Choices made as to what is attractive and what is not, may have more to do with how people subconsciously feel about themselves rather than what they consciously feel about the other person. There appears to be a correlation between how people view themselves and the choices they ultimately make in deciding on a mate. People's view of themselves is often related to how they perceive they're viewed by others.

These influences on self esteem begin in the early growing up years. For better or worse, parents, friends and significant others all influence the person's self- esteem. If people reacted positively to the person as a child then this had a positive impact on the self- image. If consistently ignored or put down in some way, then a negative self- image was likely developed. The person's view of themselves can ultimately affect their personality, social interactions and choice in mate. This can be a self- fulfilling prophecy that is subconsciously reinforced repeatedly in one relationship after another. (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986)

People can feel awkward when dealing with those from the opposite sex. These feelings of awkwardness can translate into being lost for words when conversing with the opposite sex. As a result, they view themselves as "weird." These self views reinforce negative thoughts about themselves. These views can be played out behaviorally by a general resistance to reaching out to people of the opposite sex. This becomes cyclical with resistance to reaching out affecting self esteem and self esteem affecting reaching out.

According to McKay, Davis and Fanning (2003), people struggling with issues of low self- esteem can reverse their negative self- image and move themselves in a more positive direction. As people become more aware of their automatic distorted thoughts and gently replaced them with consistent rational self- affirming comments, the mind can gradually internalize a new set of ideas and self- concept. The brain is very much like a computer, "junk in, junk out." However, if the "junk" is replaced with conscious thoughts that are self- affirming and in keeping with a positive self- image, the subconscious will internalize the new alternate data feed into it. With continued repetition, the mind will tend to believe what is consistently feed into it. Thereby, what is believed on the inside will become radiated on the outside. With an improved sense of self will come a different mind set and way of dealing with others.

There is a tendency for many people to become frustrated with not being able to alter the way they think about themselves. They end up minimizing positive attributes and magnifying what they perceive as flaws. What they fail to realize is that after many years of negative self talk, their brain's pathways had grown accustomed to such comments and believe them to be true. The brain rejects any self statement that is foreign to it. These subconscious thoughts are like the wheel ruts of the old Conestoga Wagons going out West. They become so entrenched that getting the wheels out of the ruts become difficult at best. Creating new pathways stands the best chance of breaking the worn out short sighted way of believing and behaving. Therefore, the more self-affirming the conscious messages, the greater chance of creating new pathways in the brain that will reinforce a healthier, more useful self- concept. This will result in these people viewing their world and the people in it differently. Included will be their making better, more confident choices in the type relationships that increase the chances of a successful outcome.

As we have found, far too many people growing up were given messages that were internalized as not being good enough, smart enough or whatever enough to meet the approval of their parent figures. Hence these self concepts become ingrained in the brain and internalized as "truths." As reported earlier, these messages are not only from parents, but also from society, the media, religious influences, genetic predisposition and other adult authority figures.

Children typically don't question messages from parents as to how the world functions and how they fit in that world. As adults, these messages become so engrained that they not only affect self- concept, but also the ability to make the best choices in mates. They become mesmerized by a certain look or behavior of the other person that subconsciously reinforces how they view themselves. They, in turn, tune out all the warning signs that may challenge how they view themselves and the world around them. In order to break this cycle, these adults need to begin to believe that they can be the masters of their own destiny. This means creating and taking advantage of opportunities to counteract any negative messages they feed into their minds. This means that whenever negative self talk begins, it is immediately replaced by a repertoire of internal messages that are healthy and self affirming. As a result, there will be a progression toward personal growth and ultimately making wiser choices in the people they are attracted to.

2. Opposites don't necessarily attract but underlying similarities do;

It has been said that opposites attract. However, when people dig deeper, they will find that it's the underlying similarities that hold greater weight. Similarities in values and opinions on how things should happen in the world are an initial attractive feature in the early stages of a relationship. There is a comfort that is experienced when people appear to be similar. It decreases the need for new adjustments and the ultimate discomfort involved in change. When initial attraction, due to alleged similarities, turn out to be dissimilarities, then conflict and dissatisfaction begin to surface. These dissimilarities become offensive and can also result in a threat to one's self-esteem.

Differences can strengthen a relationship when they are complementary and meet each other's needs. When characteristics are radically different, they are at first viewed as intriguing and later can become the cause of relational breakups. This is true when the "bad boy" doesn't mature in the relationship but remains the "bad boy." The successful relationships are those where couples are similar enough to satisfy each other physically and mentally and different enough to fulfill what is lacking in the other while keeping the relationship interesting (Nado, 2009).

There are also individuals who are attracted to people who are opposite to themselves. This can reinforce their own dysfunctional way of thinking and behaving. They select people who appear their opposite based on their own unresolved issues. They view their incompatibility with the other person as a way of healing past emotional wounds. They view the other person, by virtue of their being different, as possessing the "missing ingredient" that will help them become whole. For them, connecting with a partner who may be similar would not fulfill those unmet needs.

Hendrix (2006) states that incompatible couples do not necessarily automatically doom a relationship. If the couple can grow together, moving in the same direction, the relationship can become a mutually satisfying one. He believes that people fall in love with others who are basically on the same emotional level as themselves. The goal ideally is for them to work together in empathizing, supporting and validating one another. Through this process, each one in the relationship can move toward self- healing and emotional growth. He does not believe that people need to marry that "ideal" mate. He believes all couples are flawed on some level because of past unhealed childhood wounds. However, working together toward a higher level of

maturity, needs to be the focus. When the relationship is one sided and one person does most of the giving and the other does most of the taking, then Hendrix states that ending the relationship may be in order. However, any severing of a relationship can not be taken lightly. It is an emotionally painful experience regardless of who is right or wrong. He believes it's critical that the selection of a mate or partner is well thought out from the onset. The pluses need to outweigh the negatives. Otherwise the price to pay on the back end becomes monumental.

What is the answer then? They say "opposites attract." But do they? Far too often the driving force is far more complicated. The initial first impression certainly is important. However, if the person's unstated needs are not met, problems will indeed surface. Be it past emotional wounds needing to be healed or implicit or expectations needing to be met, the other person is perceived to be the one to make it alright. This rarely happens. Invariably there are flaws in the "perfect soul mate" selected, but this should not turn people off to getting into relationships. On the contrary, two flawed people can indeed help each other grow if the relationship is a trusting and open one.

For this to happen each must take responsibility for being open and honest with the other person in the relationship. This means not expecting the other person to fulfill unmet needs and expectations that the other person may not fully understand nor agreed to. However, for this to work well, each must identify and articulate what is needed from the other in the relationship. This is easier said than done. Unfortunately people have a tremendous power of self deception. However, people need to be honest about what is negotiable and what is not from the very onset. This openness and honesty stands the greatest chance of the relationship succeeding. It also paves the way for the other people to become authentic as well. Couples then have the opportunities to deal with real issues instead of the surface ones. The surface issues become a mask to hide from the deeper ones that are never talked about and consequently never get resolved.

3. Looking to others to fulfill unmet needs;

Looking to other people to fulfill unmet needs is fraught with danger. This is especially true when the other person's needs are diametrically different than one's own. Maintaining a balance between meeting one's own needs while being sensitive to those of the other person is crucial to the success of the relationship. This requires constant readjustment and realignment. Individual needs should be examined and discussed by the couple to determine which can be negotiated to a compromise and which are not available for change. Couples can easily get into power struggles trying to get the other person to change to their way of thinking. When change is resisted by the other person, there can easily be battle lines drawn, with each viewing the other as being wrong.

There may be relationships where the needs of each person are so different that the couple cannot negotiate to bring about a resolution and they may need to separate. This does not mean that one is wrong and the other is right. What it means is that both parties in the relationship have needs that are too different to make the relationship work. This is difficult to comprehend when the relationship has reached a point where the couple has shut down emotionally in order to avoid conflict or show antagonism toward one another.

By this point the relationship is in serious jeopardy and has deteriorated to such an extent that separation is the only viable option. Therefore it is essential for couples to clearly communicate their values and expectations during the beginning stages of the relationship. Then they need to discuss which of the values and expected needs can be negotiated and which cannot. Finally, they need to reach an agreement as to how those needs can be met.

.
4. Implicit versus explicit expectation;

As reported earlier by Nando Pelusi (2009) there are women who are drawn to immature men who bring forth initial passion and excitement to the relationship. Many have the belief that these men will mature into responsible and loving husbands and fathers once they settle down. However, in order for these types of relationships to have any chance of working, these women need to take a hard look at what they have then what they hope will change down the road. Having expectations that their partner has the capacity tol change at some future date is unrealistic and damaging to both.

These women need to know what they really want and accept the trade off between the initial hot date and long term simmering mate. Neither is right or wrong as long these women know what they are getting into (Pelusi, 2009). For example, the man who is found to be fun loving and attentive in the beginning may not want to be open to the fulfillment of a committed and responsible long term relationship. Therefore, women beware!

Being honest with oneself as well and take an honest look at the relationship is crucial. It can not be stressed enough that each person in the relationship be aware of their needs and wants and articulate those needs and expectations in the initial stage of the relationship. This may be a stressful at first but crucial to avoiding potential conflict. However, addressing these needs and wants up front will save a great deal of emotional pain later. People who procrastinate in the early stages of the relationship, will merely postpone the inevitable conflict in the future.

5. Past unresolved relationships affect present ones;

It's not unusual for couples to attempt to consciously or unconsciously work through the emotional pain of past unresolved relationships through current relationships. However, focusing too much on past relationships can be unhealthy in ways that can adversely affect present relationships. Hendrix (2006) reported that couples need to be aware that a current relationship is not a panacea. It cannot be viewed as an answer to wiping out all past wounds. However, it can help in the healing process through a spirit of openness and honesty. This can happen when persons in relationships feel accepted without judgment by each other in order for trust to slowly build. Couples who are committed to making the relationship work replace negativity with empathy and understanding. When this happens, old emotional wounds can become more readily healed. When this happens it paves the way to letting go of the past and appropriately addressing unmet needs in the present.

6. Food for thought;

Summary

When people first get into a relationship, there is a tendency to feel a sense of enchantment and at the same time, suppress or minimize emotions such as anger or hurt that may undermine romantic feelings (Erber & Gilmour, 1994). These illusions begin to recede once the couple is well into the relationship. However, problems that were minimized during the "honeymoon phase" of the relationship are like an undetected virus. Unless checked, the virus will surface later and erode their bond, making the relationship vulnerable. Thus, Erber and Gilmour report that couples who have unresolved underlying problems before marriage can be expected to experience a decline in satisfaction and love by their second year of marriage.

Case example #5

Chad and Allison seek counseling with Allison reporting that Chad always found fault with how she kept the house and constantly put her down. As a result they were seemingly fighting on a daily basis. However through further investigation, it was revealed that she always wanted more children and thought her husband wanted the same. She was shocked and saddened to learn that her husband did not want more children but failed to share this with her. He hid this in order to avoid conflict. He grew up in a household where family members never discussed issue of conflict. They avoided them at all costs. As a result, he never learned to appropriately deal with such issues. In this case he would rather focus on petty issues than deal with a real underlying core issue. Understandably this revelation brought this couple to a critical crossroads in their relationship. Unfortunately, their core needs were so different and each was so entrenched that their future as a couple was in jeopardy. In order to save this relationship, this core issue needed to be resolved. After much soul searching, each was not willing to budge. Chad clearly did not want children, whereas Allison did. Both were unwilling to compromise from their positions. Allison, deeply hurt, felt betrayed and lied to. Her trust in Chad faltered as did her love. The couple eventually parted ways, with Allison saying, "If I only knew this from the beginning."

The lesson to be learned here is that core needs and expectations in a relationship need to be discussed early in the relationship. If this doesn't happen, it sets the stage for needless future conflict and emotional pain. Sometimes even similar needs can be defined and addressed differently. For example, a couple can both identify a committed relationship as a core need that both have. However, each can define a committed relationship differently. One can define it as feeling valued and validated by the other. On the other hand, the other partner can define it as sharing a strong sense of family. Each partner needs to understand that similarities can be defined differently. If this is not clarified in the beginning, it can destroy a relationship.

People attempt to persuade their partners to their line of thinking. They believe that their way of thinking is obvious to them and therefore should be equally obvious to their partner. In order for these couples to experience any chance of success, each must relinquish a dualistic way of thinking. This kind of thinking results with one feeling like the loser and where resentment and defensiveness ensues. Energy would be better spent in trying to understand the other person.

Understanding does not necessarily mean agreeing. It merely means understanding the basic underlying needs and wants of the other person. It also means understanding one's self and the origin of one's own underlying needs and wants. This does not mean giving up or giving in. It rather means being willing to negotiate getting one's own needs meet while being sensitive to the needs of the other person.

Couples are encouraged to risk changing patterns of behavior that do not bring forth positive results. However, change, even positive change is resisted. It is not unusual for one partner to ask, "Why do I have to change?" The answer is that people need to take charge of their own happiness rather than feeling frustrated and turning it over to other people. Taking charge of oneself actually strengthens the likelihood of having a mutually satisfying relationship.

Relationships are often taken for granted until it's too late. However, building relations as well as building one's own sense of self is an ongoing process. Reading the following questions can help in moving closer to the goal of personal development and successful relationships. When reading the these questions, respond with "Agree, Disagree or Uncertain" (A,D,U) and circle the response that most closely reflects thoughts at this point in time.

1.) Am I aware of what my core needs are in a relationship?   A D U

2.) Do I articulate my needs clearly to my partner?   A D U

3.) Am I aware of my partners needs?   A D U

4.) Am I willing to negotiate with my partner to get my needs met? A D U

5.) Do I feel that my partner is not the same person I first met and fell in love with? A D U

6.) When there is a disagreement, does it get resolved? A D U

7.) Do I feel that I am locked in a power struggle with my partner? A D U

In going through these questions, closely examine and reflect deeply on each one. Any statement that brings forth the answer of "Uncertain" may need further exploration that would shed light on reasons for the uncertainly and what needs to be done to make the answers specifically a "Agree" or "Disagree" In thinking about the reasons for particular answers for each, attempt to come up with possible improvement strategies.

Statements about…..

Remember it is critical that you be in touch with your core needs, be able to articulate them to your partner and negotiate getting them met while at the same time respecting the needs of your partner. These core needs can be loss in surface fighting. Surface fighting is when couples continue to fight over surface issues, never getting them resolved because the main core issues are never identified and addressed. When the needs in relationships are different and are not openly discussed, conflict can ensue. Conflict is a normal part of any relationship. However, healthy conflict should bring forth a positive resolution and a higher level of functioning. Conflict is dysfunctional when unmet needs failed to be addressed resulting in power struggles.

Part II
Understanding the dynamics between personal growth and interpersonal intimacy

4

"Our I.Q. is so high when it comes to understanding others and so low when it comes to understanding ourselves."   - Unknown

A. Barriers to understanding ourselves:

As people grow into adulthood, they develop concepts of themselves and how they fit in their world. These concepts become psychologically and behaviorally entrenched. As previously reported, these concepts are like the tracks made by the Conestoga Wagons going out to the Old West. They become like deep grooves in the soil that make the getting out difficult at best. People are creatures of habit and as in breaking any habit there is a resistance to change. This resistance is not because people don't want to change for the better. In order to change a thought or behavior, requires overcoming a myriad of barriers of complicated factors and influences. Overcoming these factors and influences can seem daunting. As a result, tolerating the intolerable may seem the easier choice. However, in the long run, it is not.

Changing long standing maladaptive behavior takes work but it is worth it in order to obtain personal growth and relational improvement. A prerequisite is the necessary commit to persevere regardless of the road blocks. Developing insight into maladaptive behavior and making the necessary behavior changes is easier said than done. It requires time and effort. What couples fail to realize is that the amount of energy that goes into continuing maladaptive behavior takes greater energy than incorporating new ways to live. For those individuals willing to do the work of integrating new strategies for effective living, the potential benefits outweigh the liabilities of staying the same. Being aware of some of the barriers to change begins the step toward making choices that work better for oneself in the here and now. These include;

1. Previous programming of maladaptive behavior:

As stated previously in this book, but bears repeating, is that the brain is analogous to a computer. When people are told something consistently enough as a child, there is a tendency for the brain to believe it as true, regardless of whether it is or not. As adults, this tendency appears to become so embedded into the brain that regardless of what new information that may come in, it censures or filters it out in favor of the old worn out messages. It is not that the brain is predisposed to think negatively. On the contrary, the brain is actually functioning as it should. It accepts information that is consistently feed into it, creating deep pathways.

The brain is designed to subconsciously reject new information that is contrary to what it is programmed to accept. Therefore in order to override the circuitry, new pathways in the brain need to be created. This can occur when the brain is reprogrammed through consistent messaging that is positive and self- affirming in nature. Though initially resisted, patients can integrate a new set of behaviors based upon thoughts that are consistently reinforced.

When new thoughts are repeated consistently enough, they tend to become automatic. McKay, Davis & Fanning (2003) report that automatic thoughts often appear in shorthand and rarely as complete, conscious sentences. These subconscious thoughts are almost always believed or acted upon as if they were truths. Through repetition, they become so rigid that modifying them to fit changing situations becomes difficult. They become especially troublesome in relationships, when the other person's behavior require adjustments from old ways of thinking and behaving. Positive results can occur only when the person is open to different ways of thinking that can more effectively meet the unexpected challenges that are common in relationships.

In order for this to be accomplished, perseverance is a key ingredient. Consciously introducing alternate internal thought messages need not be believed in order to make change possible. What matters is consistent repetition. The brain cannot distinguish between truth and fiction. Therefore, if more appropriate thoughts are repeated often and persistently enough, they will be believed as truths regardless of their validity. This can bring forth the positive results desired.

2. Unresolved past issues:

It has been said that in order to get on with life, it is important to work through unresolved issues with one's parents before they die. However, in many cases unresolved issues in one's life get replayed through other people until those issues get resolved. It's the person who grows up with any alcohol dependent parent and marries an alcoholic. It's the woman who only felt loved as a child when she complied with the family's wishes and who, as an adult, defines herself by what she does as opposed to who she is. It's the man, who as a child witnessed time and again his mother berate his father and now as an adult, experiences the same at the hands of his mate.

As creatures of habit, people tend to gravitate to what they are accustomed to. On a deeper level, they also hope that new relations will be different and thus healing old wounds. However, people often connect with someone who does not heal the wounds but rather reinforce the same old dysfunctional ones of the past.

Current relationships can indeed be a vehicle for healing past wounds (Hendrix, 2008). When a couple comes into a relationship, each may bring with them childhood experiences. The important first step is identifying the sources of the emotional discountenance. Once identified, the couple needs to be able to risk being open and honest with each other. This requires a certain amount of trust in the relationship to let down the defenses and allow growth to take place. Growth can take place when each feels a sense of acceptance without prejudgment. Couples can then improve the quality of their interaction and thereby encourage free expression instead of inhibitions. Paradoxically, Hendrix (2008) theorizes that when each person in the relationship is allowed to be different, there is the creation of a mutual connection that can help heal a painful

past. When each person feels validated and understood without prejudgment, each can begin to trust and take risks. In order for this to happen, each person must understand that no matter how illogical the partner may think or behave, to them it is logical and appropriate. Personal growth can come when people can be authentically themselves without judgement.

3. Unrealistic expectation of oneself:

Many people grow up feeling that somehow they have fallen short of the expectations of important adult figures in their lives. For example, parents can give their children messages, either implicitly or explicitly, that their children's value lies in their performance as opposed to who they are. This does not have to be intentional. As a matter of fact, this dynamic interchange can occur on the subconscious level of the mind without parental awareness.

Case example #6

A patient, I will call John, expressed a growing unhappiness and dissatisfaction with his marriage. It seemed to him that he was on a constant emotional roller coaster with his wife, June. John reported he had made many attempts at pleasing his wife by responding to her stated needs from him. He was fairly comfortable in his role as the "go to guy" in the family. However, of late he had become emotionally drained. He reported that June was doing less and less around and expecting John to do more and more. It appeared to him that he invariably of his performance.

In discussing his childhood, it was revealed that John was the oldest in a family of five. His parents had a distant relationship, with no outward signs of affection. His father worked hard and spent many hours away from home. His father's primary role with the children was that of harsh disciplinarian. John would remember his mother saying, "Wait until your father gets home!" when any of the children did something his mother did not approve of.. His mother was very sickly and often would call upon him to perform duties for her in order to make her life easier.

With no overt love shown in the family, John quickly learned that if he performed well he avoided the harsh punishment of his dad and gained the recognition and accolades from his mother. Over his growing up years this was reinforced in other relationships where recognition came from what he did as opposed to who he was.. This worked l for him during his adult relationships. Through years of subconscious programming, John continued in this role without giving it any thought. At work, his boss would go to him to take on additional project that his co-workers were reluctant to do. This was even the case when it was beyond his job responsibilities. This carried over into his home life. He behaved toward June in much the same way he did with his mother, thinking he would get the positive feedback by taking on job responsibilities.

What John failed to understand was that June, because of her past, had different needs and different ways of expecting those needs be met. June grew up in a home where little was expected of her. She described herself as "daddy's little girl". In addition to being taking care of by her father, she was affirmed without much effort on her part. Being married to John, she was having her concrete needs met but not her abstract, emotional needs. John was able to do

things around the house for June but was not able to show the intimacy she also craved. His parents never conveyed that this was important. As a result, John became disenchanted and confused, failing to understand the source of June's own unhappiness. Like June, John also needed validation. What John needed to realize was that the way he was going about it, was not getting him the results he had grown to expect.

John gradually became aware that his own worth need not be tied to what he did but rather who he was as a person. He had to get that from within and not from outside himself. Once he reached this level of understanding, he became more balanced in his life. This meant that he could continue to care for the needs of others while balancing it with appropriately caring for himself. He finally learned to say "no" without feeling guilty.

John being more balanced made room for him to be more emotionally present for June. With a change in John, came a corresponding change in June. In order to save the marriage, June e needed to be a partner with John and not have a hostile dependent relationship with him. They each became aware of and challenged outmoded learned behavior. Experiencing non defensive attitudes, they learn to trust and be open to each other about their needs. From this, they were able to negotiate getting their needs met appropriately.

4. Unrealistic expectations of others;

In an attempt to resolve personal issues, it is not unusual for people to unconsciously expect their partner to think and behave as they do. They reason that if these expectations are fulfilled by the partner, than harmony will ensue. Sometimes these expectations are stated at the onset of the relationship. More often than not they remain covert or minimized well into the relationship. Unfulfilled expectations by one's partner can be viewed as resistance, resulting in relational problems.

Case example #7

Monica and Joel reported a chronic problem in their relationship. Joel started out by reporting that a big part of the problem in their relationship stemmed from Monica constantly calling him during the course of the day at work. It could go as high as ten to twenty calls on any given day. Joel had made numerous attempts on getting Monica to curtail her incessant calls but to no avail. Monica's response was that she understood that her numerous calls may be frustrating to Joel at times. However, she felt close to him when they spoke and it helped her deal with her own frustrations over the course of the day. Besides, if he really loved her, she theorized, he'd understand and wouldn't have a problem with this.

Joel saw this as a way of Monica attempting to control him. Monica interpreted Joel's problem with her calling as a sign of a lack of commitment to the relationship. To understand the dynamics of what is going on here, one needs to understand Monica's early childhood. While growing up she never felt she experienced love, affection or acceptance. Her mother was cold and critical, often favoring Monica's younger sister. As a result, Monica grew up looking to others to provide her with what she lacked as a child. This carried over into her marriage. If Joel was resistant to being available to her when she felt the need, she interpreted it as rejection and being abandoned. These were similar feelings she felt as a child. Therefore, what was viewed as

controlling by Joel was really Monica's way of dealing with insecurities from her past.

Joel reaction to Monica's behavior was the result of his own unresolved issues. As a child, he was hovered over by his mother. He viewed himself as having little opportunity to do many of the things other children his own age did because of his mother constantly monitoring his activity thus limiting his opportunity to exert his independence. This carried over in his relationship with Monica, mistaking her intent with his earlier life experiences. His hostile reaction to Monica was a direct response to his struggles in dealing with unresolved issue with his mother.

In order to move past this deadlock, Monica needed to work on feeling good about herself as a person. Only then could she let go of unrealistic expectations she had of Joel to fill a void from childhood. Joel was able to realize the Monica was not an extension of his mother but a separate person in her own right. He was then able to negotiate with her in a way that would safeguard his need for independence while being sensitive to his wife's need to feel loved and validated. As a result, she limited her calls to him and he spontaneously began calling her.

People often look to their partner to meet their expectations and as a result, put undue pressures on their partners and themselves. Partners are put in the awkward position of feeling pressured to fill those unrealistic expectations regardless of whether or not it is in the best interests of either one of them. It also puts undue pressures on the people who have unrealistic expectations because they become dependent on external forces to fill internal needs. This is especially difficult when other people have no intention of fulfilling those needs. Chances are there may be no understanding of what those needs are. In addition, other people are looking to have their own needs as well. To complicate things further, if those needs are diametrically opposed, a power struggle can ensue. However, if after dialoguing, a negotiated resolution is not met, then it is up to each of the parties to take responsibility for resolving each of their own personal issues that add to the problems in the relationship. Focusing on changing oneself actually strengthens the chances of relationship success.

5. *Normal stress versus emotional overload:*

Stress is part of life (McQuade & Aikman 1978). To live is to experience stress. Even positive changes can bring forth stress. Stress is one of those carryovers from prehistoric times. During those times the stressors were more concrete like struggling to alive. What has evolved to present day is the fight/flight response. Unlike prehistoric times, it is not a predator to be faced and dealt with. It is rather the daily pressures of life that are never resolved. It is when this chronic stress is not resolved that people end up with stress overload. This can include people in relationships. Common stress experienced by people in relationships can occur when couples have conflicting goals and are unable to find ways to come to a meaningful resolution.

Pressure and stress come from two main sources: from the outside world and from within oneself (Flanagan, 1990). It is Flanagan's position that stress from the environment comes in the shape of unexpected life events. They can include the strain of ongoing, unsatisfactory relationships and from daily hassles. Equally important are internal sources of stress which are equally varied. They can come from physical illness. They can also come from faulty messages

that are consistently repeated when growing up which can result in problem behaviors and habits in adulthood. Fixated maladaptive patterns of thinking and erroneous beliefs about oneself or one's world can be manifested in relational conflict that repeat itself over and over.

What starts off as an external pressure (e.g., low-paying job) can take its toll on health or lifestyle or affect the person's outlook about self. This in turn can also affect the nature of a relationship. Equally, ill health, problem behaviors, or faulty thinking all can exacerbate the impact of external events, making it that much more difficult to bounce back. In this case, life becomes a self fulfilling prophecy. The high stress level reinforces the negative self talk which in turn adversely affects the person's self- concept which affects the nature of relationships.

For Monat and Lazarus (1977), stress can manifest itself in relationships through conflict that usually involves the simultaneous presence of two incompatible needs between two people that are not being met. When conflicting unmet needs are present, frustration and feeling uncared for by one's partner inevitable. The action steps necessary to have a particular need fulfilled in the relationship may be incompatible with those of the other person. Appropriately addressing opposing needs can be difficult unless there is open dialogue. An example would be if one partner wants to spend money now for enjoyment and the other wants to save up for future pleasure. Without dialogue and being open to negotiation negotiate, each of the needs would be negated. By the same token, if one need is realized to the exclusion of the other, then the other person could easily experience frustration and resentment. This can strain the relationship.

 Monat and Lazarus support this view by reporting that when there is no resolution or negotiated compromise, the result is a continued build up of the relational stress, leading to distress or stress overload. This in turns manifests itself through various nonproductive ways as acting out behavior, internalized frustration, constant bickering and emotional distancing.

They go on to report that many people in relationships are on emotional overload, taking on too much during the course of the day. They attempt to balance the responsibilities of being a spouse, parent, employer or employee, taking on household chores, paying bills and on and on. This can easily bring on distress, and as a consequence, the relationship is not viewed as a potential source of mutual support but rather an additional source of stress. Couples who experience this kind of distress put an unusual amount of pressure on their relationship. They find that they have little time to deal with all they have to do during the course of the day, let alone work on their relationship. As a result, these couples behave more like married singles than partners, leading emotionally separate lives, each dealing with life's pressures alone.

Case example #8

Edward and Anne came to my office reporting to be stressed out in an otherwise solid marriage. They were in generally good health, though Anne did have a bout with cancer that was now in remission. During her recuperation, Edward took great care of her. He had a good job, though like with many companies, there had been a fair amount of downsizing, resulting in an increased workload on his part, which tired him out at times. However, he prided himself on being a hard worker. He viewed himself as someone who could "juggle many balls". He got

satisfaction when he was able to "take care of business." Yet he was also quite hard on himself when his performance did not bring forth the results he would have liked. When this happened, he would think nothing of being self deprecating with negative self talk.

However, of late, with the added job pressures, he was beginning to feel physically stressed at an exhausting level. This, in turn, was adversely affecting his marriage. He was becoming short-tempered with his wife over simple things that he now found annoying. As a result, Anne felt put down and became defensive. The marriage now was beginning to be adversely affected.

This was especially stressful for Anne, in that it brought back memories of her growing up in a household where she thought she could do nothing right in her parents' eyes. She did not know from day to day how her parents would respond to her. She often felt like she was "walking on eggs". Edward's criticism put her in a state of perpetual stress. Edward grew up in a home environment that judged him by what he did rather than who he was. Now he found himself behaving in the same way toward his wife as his parents did with him. The result put him and his wife on emotional overload and was putting a breach in their marriage.

This illustrates how one's past unresolved issues can adversely affect one's sense of self- and in turn adversely affect one's relationship. Edward internalized the negative messages he received from his parents when growing up. Now he has become his own worst critic. To make matters worse, he was starting to be overly critical of his wife in their interpersonal relationship. This was something he experienced as a child and was certainly something didn't want for himself as an adult.

Edward was a classic caretaker of others but not a very good caretaker of himself. This was exemplified with his not paying heed to the stress overload he was experiencing. As a result it was adversely affecting his marriage and how he was feeling about himself. Slowly Edward learned to be a good enough parent to himself. He began to balance focusing on his own needs without losing sight of the needs of those close to him. He joined the local gym and faithfully went there three nights a week. He replaced his negative self- talk with positive affirmations about himself and his performance. He was more realistic about what he could do and what could be delegated to others or not done at all. Finally, he learned to deal with his wife in an open and honest way, eliciting her support as opposed to seeking to control her and the situations they were in. With his taking responsibility for taking better care of himself, he was in a better position to care for those around him.

Persons like Edward who take personal responsibility for making simple changes, take control over their lives to reduce their unhealthy stress and improve their interpersonal relations.

Also, stresses at work can adversely affect people's ability to deal effectively with their relationships at home. Therefore, the simple act of Edward taking his lunch break at work away from his desk refreshed him with a renewed mindset. He also made it a point of getting to work on time and leaving on time, while giving his optimal performance during work hours. This went a long way to decreasing his work stress and added balance and control to his life, which resulted in a beneficial effect on his relationship with his wife.

Edward was also able to fully realize that he was in a partnership with Anne. It was important that they needed to rejuvenate each other as a couple. This meant spending time together away from the kids. This did not mean they had to go out and spend a lot of money. They enjoyed taking a walk around the neighborhood at night or going out to a movie or taking a ride to the park. A simple act of going to bed together at around the same time each night and cuddling together went a long way to bring them closer together and lowering their stress levels at the end of the day.

What goes on at home certainly can impact the stress levels and conversely the quality of the relationship between two people. Many people go from the job to home continuing with household duties with no transition time for themselves. This to be especially true with women who work out of the home during the day, come home, prepare supper, clean up afterward, get the kids ready for bed, prepare lunches for the following day and throwing in a load of wash in between. This can result in high level of stress and resentment when they view their husbands as not sharing equally with household responsibilities.

Case example #9

Frank and Debra are in a relationship, with Debra complaining of being emotionally and physically drained. She complained about being overwhelmed with work at her job and the responsibilities at home. She reported that Frank generally sat on the couch or at the computer playing games when home from work. His excuse was that he was tired after a hard day's work. He acknowledged that his wife worked all day as well. However, he viewed it as different because she sat behind a desk all day and he did manual labor. As a result, Debra did not feel she had a partner in the relationship but rather was a caretaker for him and the children. This significantly increased the stress level in her life which added to the marital conflict.

Frank was resistant to change and Debra was not prepared to leave the relationship. In order to bring her stress level down and maintain her sanity, she needed to take personal responsibility for bringing more balance in her life. Given the limited time available to Debra she learned to focus on the significant few rather the insignificant many. She signed up for yoga classes three times a week and went with her cousin. In order to find time to do this, there were certain chores left for Frank or were left undone. She learned to make do with the time she had available to her.

Rushing around when she got home left Debra tired and stressed out. She started to become aware of breathing properly. She found the simple act of slowing down and being aware of breathing properly made a world of difference in her life. By learning to breath through her diaphragm, which is located in the abdominal area, she lowered her stress level. She learned that breathing properly could be done anywhere at any time. Taking short breathing breaks during the course of the day helped Debra automatically initiate a brief breathing exercise particularly if a critically stressful situation occurred during the course of her day. Implementing these strategies went a long way in bringing proper control into her life. Lowering her stress level resulted in her being more present in the here and now. This allowed her to take charge for her own emotional happiness and resulted in a less stressful and more realistic relationship with Frank. Her focus become more taking responsibility for herself rather than making Frank

responsible for it. She developed clear boundaries as to what she would do and not do around the house. As a result, Frank was forced to take on more around the house or certain things would not get done. In the end, Debra's stress level went down and self esteem went up.

People can't avoid stress. It is part of life. However, recognizing it and making the necessary life changes will bring forth a more balanced existence and add to the productivity of relationships. The following are ways of bringing down stress levels, which can also positively affect relationships.

➢ **Let go of unrealistic expectations of others.**

By unrealistic expectations it is meant that expecting other people to behave in certain ways in spite of ample evidence to the contrary. Couples would have more success in trying to take control of their own behavior instead of expending a great deal of useless energy in trying to change the unacceptable behavior of their partner.

➢ **Give yourself permission to do something for yourself.**

Couples need to be aware of how they give up parts of their lives in order to meet other peoples' unrealistic needs. Sacrificing one's own sense of self in order to meet the needs of others may not be in the best interest of either party. This does not mean becoming narcissistic or self centered but rather balancing taking proper care of oneself while appropriately caring for others.

➢ **Be gentle with yourself.**

Couples need to be realistic in understanding that they can't do everything expected of them by others and themselves. The world will not end nor should love be lost, if people are less than perfect in the relationship. If the contrary occurs in a relationship, then there are underlying problems than the couple cares to examine.

➢ **Realize that other people don't define who you are… you do.**

Unfortunately in far too many relationships there are individuals who continuously try to meet the expectations of the other person. They define themselves by what they do that pleases the other person as opposed to who they are under the surface. Focusing on developing a better sense of self that you can feel good about is critical in staving off the ill affects of stress.

➢ **Know that it's not always about you.**

Couples typically react not to the specifics of their partner's behavior but rather to how they interpret that behavior to be. This can easily result in victimization. Checking out the intent of one's partner and being aware of what's going on internally is important. Individuals may find that the problem may not lie with the other parson, but rather within oneself.

➢ **Take responsibility for your own health and well being.**

People are faced with choices everyday. With each choice, comes some type of trade off. For example, when faced with the choice between health versus ill health, people need to ask themselves, "Is a particular behavior going to move me toward the ultimate goal of good health?" Will the person be able to endure being initially uncomfortable with a change in behavior in favor the potential long range gains? There will be a payback regardless of what decision is made. The choice should be the individual's responsibility. Leaving the choice to others only increases stress levels and can place undo pressures on relationships.

6. Misuse of anger:

The emotion of anger is viewed as an essential part of the tool-kit for living that can assist with critical tasks to be performed in the here and now. In fact, without being able to express anger appropriately, people would be unable to function as social creatures. Moreover, any person who is unable to get angry--or unable to do so effectively--is at a relative disadvantage when dealing with others. He or she loses the possibility of an adult relationship based on equality and ends up giving up power to the other person. (Fein, 1993).

Anger is often a misunderstood and maligned emotional experience. It is an expression of an emotion that is the result of no simple cause and effect. It is rather a complicated composite of individual personality traits, lessons of expression learned from family of origin, prior unresolved memories of past emotional hurts and wounds and the residuals of gender roles, just to mention a few.

As a result, men and women react to feelings of anger differently. Even today male children are more readily given permission to feel and express anger than female children. It is more permissible for girls to cry when feeling angry or hurt, while this is viewed as weak when manifested in a male child. This sets the stage for women to suppress their anger and for men to suppress less aggressive feelings such as fear and weakness. While men tend to act out their anger, women tend to internalize their anger and become self-effacing or even self-destructive. Due to centuries of cultural programming, most women have long since given up the natural instinct to retaliate directly when angry (Engel, 2002).

Appearing "self- reliant" and "emotionally disciplined" is one way men can "take charge of a situation." However, with this being a way of life, it appears they deny some underlying feelings, thus creating a situation where stress overload can often be experienced. Stress overload or distress, can come out in the form of anxiety attacks, being short tempered or angry as well as experiencing a chronic depression. Women, on the other hand, either silently, but resentfully, hold their distress in or chronically complain to their partners out of a sense of frustration and powerlessness (Engel, 2002).

In addition, Engel reports that if something goes wrong, a man tends to look outside himself first for the cause of the problem. According to research this tendency is based partly on the male biological tendency to take action (versus introspection) or even to blame others for the problem. Women, on the other hand, are viewed as looking inside themselves for the cause of a problem. They are more inclined to blame themselves for the problem rather than blame

someone else. This may explain why men tend to become abusive in relationships. Women, on the other hand, tend to be victims of abuse. They tend to more often question and blame themselves when in conflict with their partners (Engel, 2002).

Feindler (2006) stresses the importance of culture in determining what a person will do when angry. He also views gender and social status as a determinant of how anger is expressed. His research revealed that society does not view women favorably who overtly express anger at their male counterparts in a public forum. Men, on the other hand, who express anger overly, are not looked upon in the same manner.

Couples coming into counseling often view anger as a negative emotion. In actuality, the feeling of anger, like any other emotion, is amoral, neither good nor bad. How one deals with anger, is where the importance lies

Braiker (1976) theorizes that the brain and body utilize anger as a protective mechanism. He views anger as an emotional reaction that signals that something is wrong and that possible harm may be in the offing. When expressed appropriately, it is a response to a real stressor or frustration that is understandable to those around you. However, when expressed inappropriately, with blame and aggression, it can have an extremely negative impact on people. For example, if persons inappropriately have their rights and boundaries violated or are subjected to abuse, exploitation or other maltreatment, then expressing anger is entirely appropriate. However, in close relationships, where there is an intensity of emotional connectedness, anger can be expressed inappropriately. When used aggressively, it can be a vehicle for attacking the other person rather than the offensive behavior. It is not unusual to experience a mixture of other feelings when anger is expressed inappropriately. These feelings can include guilt, remorse and depression which compounds the problem (Feindberg, 2006)

Ernest Johnson (1990) views anger "as being the result of both external and internal factors." To Johnson, external factors might include frustrations, annoyance triggered by others, verbal and/or physical abuse, unfair treatment, and critical evaluations by others. Internal factors such as thoughts, expectations, and self- statements (the things we tell ourselves) are thought to influence the person's sense of self. The negative self talk can result in angry feelings. Johnson goes on to state that depending on which factor is the trigger, two basic courses of action or styles of behavior can result when experiencing feelings of anger. The first is withdrawal-avoidance (Anger-In). Although the person continues to think about the situation resulting in anger, the response can be to emotionally or physically withdraw from the issue at hand. The anger in this case is internalized and directed inward. This avoidance tactic may continue and allowed to build up until the person breaks down or expresses it indirectly. Whatever way it is expressed, nothing gets resolved and the pattern repeats itself over and over. In these types of relationships, it is not uncommon for one partner to flee and the other partner to pursue. The more one pursues, the more the other flees. The makes for a vicious cycle that goes nowhere.

Johnson names the second course of action as antagonism-hostility-aggression (Anger-Out). In this style of behavior, anger and irritability often escalates to physical and/or verbal aggressive behaviors toward people and objects in the environment. We see this in abusive relationships, particularly with men against women. It is also witnessed in the fairly new phenomenon called "road rage."

In relationships, Johnson theorized that how people viewed particular situations had a direct correlation to how they respond to other people. He went on to state that many times in a relationship, it is not so much what is going on in any given situation but rather the person's thoughts and interpretations about what was going on. Therefore, if in a relationship, a partner's behavior was rather benign but was not interpreted as such, it could lead to a bitter argument. From this he deduced that much misinterpretation of reality is not based on what is happening in the here and now but is often colored by some past cognitive programming

In elaborating, Johnson theorized that when someone expressed anger inappropriately, it may in reality be a defensive reaction to some unresolved deeper issue that was not being dealt with. In order to counteract this self- defeating learned style of behavior, the person needs to honestly examine the true source of the anger. When this happens in relationships, couples can begin to problem solve around the real underlying issues in the relationship rather than pseudo-problems that they continuously argue about and never seem to resolve (Johnson, 1990).

Reiser found that women, when angry at their partners, had several common themes. They included being angry by what they perceived as a lack of responsibility and maturity exhibited by the men in their lives. The women defined a lack of responsibility as exemplified by their partner not earning enough money to support the family, not viewing the family as a top priority or not providing quality time with the children. Immaturity was defined by their partner not following through on what was said, not taking an active role doing chores around the house, not calling when not being able to be home on time or not picking up after themselves. Several women felt that the men in their lives were also not responsible for themselves around health care. These men are viewed as dependent on their partners to care for them or actually engaged in self- destructive behavior, such as abusing drugs and/or alcohol. (Reiser,1999).

Reiser also reported that the second most common theme provoking anger involved domineering and controlling behavior on the part of their partners. He found that in certain relationships, couples get into power struggles. In these cases, one would try to get the other to focus solely on getting his or her needs met by the other person. When this fails, stress and frustrations is experienced and aggressive feelings are expressed. The results of unrealistically attempting to change others' behavior only reinforce a repetition of the same dysfunctional patterns. Time would be better spent in each person attempting to become aware of their own contribution to potentially angry conversations or confrontations.

Far too often people in relationships deny or suppress their anger. This may be the result of not getting current or past needs met. Getting in touch with the origin of those unmet needs and expressing them appropriately will go a long way to circumventing useless conflict and assuring appropriate resolution. This means becoming aware of the angry feelings and their origin. Taking ownership of one's own feelings and not blaming the other person can be a big step toward resolution. Instead of saying, "You make me so angry when you do that", it is more constructive to say, "When you do that I feel angry" (Fein,2006). Blame and accusations play no role in the constructive expression of anger. To the extent which people begrudgingly spend time being angry at their partners for not being as they would like, results in a needless expending of energy on something they can not control. However, if they can reframe their thinking, they can then reframe their behavior in

areas that does not waste time attempting to control people and outside circumstances but rather their reaction to them. To quote the Greek Philosopher, Epicetus, "It's not what happens to you but how you react to it that matters."

Focusing on communicating clearly and being willing to negotiate getting the needs of both met will decrease the frustration and anger within the relationship. The key is balance between satisfying one's own needs and those of the other person without the personhood of each of the partners being sacrificed. As a result the anger associated with unmet needs not being properly addressed will be greatly diminished.

Braiker (1976), points out that like an on/off switch. Impulsive overreaction usually involves unresolved issues of the past resurfacing in the present. It can also be the results of a gradual buildup over time, with something happening that triggers an explosive reaction. The consistent suppression or internalization of angry feelings can also result in ill effects. It shuts down the emotions and leads to frustration and a sense of powerlessness on the part of the partner. Understanding this can help in developing strategies that will effectively manage and control the anger. However, if the person can take a hard look at the underlying source of the anger and express it appropriately, it can be enhance the relationship and bring a couple closer together. By expressing the anger appropriately, it should be expressed clearly, firmly and without finding fault with the person but rather dealing with the behavior and its root causes.

The question is, "How can people acquire and maintain personal power when it comes to effectively dealing with heated disagreements?" In getting to the answer to that question, the following recommendations may be helpful when dealing with individuals and couples.

➢ Be aware of the common situations that press your buttons and develop clear strategies before the anger provoking event occurs.

➢ Remember that getting hot and forceful will only bring forth defensiveness on the part of the partner. The focus needs to be on a negotiated end and not on a power struggle, were there is a winner and a loser.

➢ Be open to an alternate view of the issue rather than merely focusing on blaming the other person

➢ Remember, when emotions are high, there is always the option of walking away from the conflict temporarily in order to cool off. This is to be followed up by both coming back to deal with the issue once cooler heads have prevailed.

➢ Discuss a specific conflictual issue face to face and not over the phone or through text messaging.

➢ Stick with the issue at hand and do not succumb to the temptation of bringing up unrelated issues during this time. Once the issue at hand is fully discussed and dealt with then the next issue can be presented.

Weisinger (1985) talks about common themes that can provoke anger in relationships. He mentions money issues, indifference to one's partner's feelings, sex/adultery, irresponsibility and addiction to work, drinking, drugs and gambling. To him it is essential that couples identify what specific behavior is upsetting and contrary to their value system. In order for the relationship to sustain, these issues need to be negotiated to the satisfaction of both. Each must take personal responsibility to be open and honest about making the necessary changes. The couple needs to be open to negotiating various solutions without compromising the core values of each. Remember much of the anger in relationships stem from the frustration, irritation and annoyances over the perceived unfairness expressed by one partner with the other. In order to change this dysfunctional cycle, couples need to take a hard look at each other, warts and all and determine what is negotiable and what is not. That takes courage and maturity.

7. Anxiety and depression:

Anxiety and depression are similar in that both can paralyze the person with feelings and emotions that can adversely affect a relationship. These feelings can mask deeper issues that the person does not want to deal with. Lacking the necessary trust that one can be open and honest with one's partner can result in further alienation. This can reinforce the likelihood of the depression and anxiety. This can be compounded when a person is predisposed to such feelings. In some cases depression and/or anxiety can be found to run in an extended family. The combination of heredity and environmental influences can make persons more vulnerable than those in the general population.

Beck and Emery (1985) state that feelings of anxiety are more apt to be present when people are feeling especially vulnerable or threatened. This can especially be true in relationships when there are added feelings of powerlessness and insecurities. In this state, thinking can easily be distorted. When their thinking is distorted, people underestimate or minimize the positive aspects of their relationship. On the reverse side, any minor problem area is more apt to be magnified. This often results in it adversely affecting how the people feel about their partners and about themselves. This, in turn, affects how the couple relates to one another in the relationship.

The following are two examples of couples dealing with anxiety and depression.

Case example #10

Megan complains that since childhood she had struggled on and off with anxiety. She recalled that her mother was also affected by debilitating anxiety. However, it was getting worse and she was getting anxious in situations she never did before. It was even spilling over into her married life. It was becoming more difficult for her to take of the basic needs of her family such as shopping and getting to work. When she left the house in order to go to these places, Megan experienced constant anxiety and dread that was overpowering at times. Her husband, Charles, failed to understand what Megan was going through. He was feeling frustrated with his powerlessness to affect change in her behavior. He would tell her that there was nothing to be anxious about and to snap out of it. She couldn't find a logical reason for her anxiety either.

Megan's high anxiety made it more and more difficult for her to function effectively at home and at work. She didn't want to lose her marriage but she knew there was just so much that Charles was willing to take of this type of behavior. Megan did not want to feel this way but she grew reluctant to talk about her feelings, fearing that Charles would not understand and merely minimize them.

Megan had difficulties being able to face and deal with the underlying sense of powerlessness she was feeling in her marriage and in her life. This, in turn, was manifesting itself in her feeling anxious about not being able to function in her world.

Equally debilitating was Megan's feelings of depression. Her anxiety and depression manifested themselves with insomnia and fatigue. With the depression, her mood was dark and foreboding regardless of whether or not things were going alright.   She had a lack of energy, finding it laborious to the simplest tasks. She put a great deal of energy into exhibiting a light, airy facade.

Megan had grown up in an atmosphere where others in her family had viewed her as not measuring up, and who fell short of their expectations. Like her, her mother was also a very anxious person, always wanting to please her husband and fearful of falling short. Growing up in this environment, Megan internalized these messages and they became a way of life for her. Therefore even in her marriage, she defined herself by what she did for Charles and children rather than who she was as a person.

In order to get out of this self-defeating cycle, Megan began to challenge the distorted thoughts she had of herself and began to feel some sense of personal control over her life. She began by becoming aware of the many negative messages about herself that she learned from her childhood and which she now incorporated as part of her identity. From there, she began to add to her repertoire more realistic, healthier messages. This did not happen overnight. After all, her negative, distorted view of herself did not occur overnight. With hard work and perseverance, she began new ways of thinking and behaving. This in turn helped her take personal responsibility for her own wellbeing and improved her way of relating to her husband within her marriage.

Megan was a classic caretaker and people pleaser. She was all too willing to do for others and was very poor at doing for herself. However, she began to recognize the lack of balance in her life and its origin in her growing up years. For her, not doing for others brought forth a fear of displeasing the other person and risking possible rejection. Slowly Megan began to take risks in taking personal responsibility for herself and surrendering herself entirely to those around her. She began to summon the courage to let her feelings and needs be known to Charles. True to form, he initially minimized her feelings, stating that she was being too sensitive. She did not let this deter her but persevered, taking ownership for how she felt and not apologizing for having various feelings and needs which may be different than his. She began to take responsibility for her own behavior and not for those of Charles.

47

In addition, Megan began to do more for herself. She took up yoga and faithfully attended classes three times a week. Charles was given the responsibility of watching their children and getting them ready for bed. She reconnected with girlfriends from high school and started meeting for dinned once a month. They are even planning a vacation trip with just the women.

Slowly with Megan changing, Charles began relating to her in a more open manner. They began to trust each other more. Charles even shared at one point that he had minimized her feelings because of his own struggle with expressing his true feelings. In growing up, he was taught that expressing feelings was a sign of weakness and he did not want to appear weak.

As Megan and Charles grew closer, her level of anxiety began to recede. They experienced a deeper emotional connection. They were eventually able to share everything with one another. Megan was able to be fully honest with Charles and with herself.

Case example #11

A second woman by the name of Christine went around very downcast and expressionless. She was hesitant to admit that she was suffering from depression. She reported that though things were going well with her husband and children, she derived no joy in her life. She had struggled for years with her husband, Aldo's alcohol dependency. However, he admitted to needing help and entered an alcohol rehabilitation facility. Christine reported that Aldo had not taken a drink of alcohol in months. Though she had struggled with her husband for years to get help for his drinking problem, now that he was sober, it brought her no joy. As a matter of fact, she was a bit annoyed that it took him so long.

Christine reported a history of depression in her family. However, she did not think this was related her present bout with depression. Her appetite had changed and she found herself eating more than usual, She was sleeping more and found it difficult to motivate herself to do even the simplest tasks. She could not figure out why she should feel this way. This only brought her further down into the pit of despair thus compounding her problem. She wanted to get at the root of her problem so she could begin to enjoy life which she now viewed as dark and empty.

In the case of Christine, she complained of long standing depression. She too was a product of her past. Situations involving conflict were never talked about in her home while growing up. Her mother, as well as other members of her extended family, also suffered from depression. As with anxiety, it is not unusual to have other members of a family to also suffer from periods of depression.

Within her marriage, with her husband, Aldo, now having a period of sobriety under his belt, he became more involved in himself. He would work all day. When he came home, he would sit in front of the computer and play video games all night, leaving Christine to do all the chores after a day a work herself. This left Christine with a residue of resentment and anger. She turned her anger inward and blamed herself for problems in the relationship. As a result, she became depressed and her self esteem was adversely affected. Her depression got so bad that she would more often than not retreat into the bedroom and withdraw into sleep. This behavior typified that which is described by (Engel, 2002).

Christine thought with Aldo no longer abusing alcohol, he would be part of the family. However, what happened was more of the same but without the drinking. When Christine attempted to raise her concerns, Aldo saw nothing wrong with his behavior. After all he was no longer drinking nor hanging around the bars at night. His attitude heightened Christine not feeling validated and thinking that her husband was not capable of empathizing with her feelings. As a consequence, she felt further alone and isolated. Her anger toward her husband was not expressed directly but rather was internalized. Her depression was anger turned inward.

Slowly Christine got in touch with and acknowledged her anger toward Aldo and her situation. This did not result in a change in Aldo's behavior. However, it did get her in touch with the source of her depression and validated for herself her entitlement to a life better than the one she was living. This was important in alleviating her depression. Instead of giving into the belief of pursuing "peace at any price", she was able to assert her needs, opinions and beliefs and attempt at negotiating a resolution of the differences between her and her husband.

Christine reached a point of realizing the relationship was no longer working. This had nothing to do with falling out of love or bitter reprisals. It was simply two people no longer going in the same direction or wanting the same things out of a marriage. In a strange way, Aldo's drinking kept the marriage together and gave it purpose. With sobriety in the forefront, the dynamics in the relationship had changed. Aldo wanted the continuation of the same old, same old. Christine wanted something different. She now wanted a true partner in the relationship, with whom she could grow emotionally, mentally and spiritually with. Aldo simply was not that man. The couple parted, giving Christine an opportunity of finding the kind of relationship that could fill her core needs and values in a relationship.

What Megan and Christine described is not unique. Many people seeking counseling have at least one partner who is struggling from anxiety and/or chronic depression, which adversely affects their relationships. As exemplified, in many cases, the anxiety and depression reported are not the real problems but rather a defense against facing what is really going on in the relationships. Both women resolved it differently. Both took responsibility for themselves and ceased a dysfunctional dependency on others that sapped them of psychic energy and their own authenticity.

In some cases the appropriate use of prescribed medications to be extremely helpful when dealing with anxiety and/or depression. Medication is not a panacea and there are those who argue against their use. However, based on each unique individual, especially those suffering from depression, medication can be useful. This is especially so when coupled with counseling, such as cognitive and behavioral therapy. In the last two decades, there are many new drugs that have been used successfully when dealing with anxiety and depression. It is critical that people consult with their physician about this and work in partnership with the physician to determine what medication and dosage would work best. The reader will find a short list of common medications currently being used for anxiety and/or depression listed in the back of this book.

8. Food for thought:

Summary

It is not unusual for people to vow not to exhibit the same type of behaviors as those of their parents. However, much to their dismay, they discover that many of the unwanted traits end up being part of their own behavioral pattern as adults. For many people, this becomes disconcerting. What they fail to realize is that consistent messages consistently given at an early age, tend to be internalized as adults. These behavioral and cognitive traits get played out in how people think about themselves and the choices made in relationships. Reconditioning the brain to think and behave otherwise takes insight into the origin of present thought and behavior as well as persistence in achieving the change desired. Any change, even if it is positive, results in stress. Those who are resistant to exploring and implementing possible changes, run the risk of experiencing a greater amount of stress or distress.

As people elect to go through the change process, it's important to keep in mind the following;

➢ Letting go of unrealistic expectations of others and themselves.
➢ Taking the time out to do something for themselves.
➢ Realizing that other people don't define who they are… they do.
➢ Knowing that change attempted in small increments stands the best chance of success.
➢ Taking personal responsibility for their health and well being.

Emotions and feelings are part of any relationship. Being in an intimate relationship with someone can result in one's emotional bottoms getting pushed as with no other type of relationship. This is because of the nature of the relationship brings people closer together to the point of knowing what will affect the other person and what will not. This is certainly no less the case than when it comes to feelings of anger. Anger is amoral, neither good nor bad. The importance lies in how anger is dealt with.

When dealing with angry feelings, it may be important to consider the following food for thought.

➢ Know that anger does not work like an on/off switch.
➢ Anger expressed appropriately can enhance a relationship by resolving issues.
➢ Inappropriately expressed anger leaves scares and added resentment.
➢ Suppression or internalization of angry feelings adversely affects the person's health.

Negative feelings, left unresolved, can act as stumbling blocks in dealing with issues from the past and can adversely affect present relationships. They can manifest themselves through the expression of unrealistic expectations of oneself and of others. These unfulfilled expectations end up with compounded feelings of frustration and powerlessness by both parties. Taking personal charge of one's life can be a means of attaining inner balance and an enhanced relationship.

Though this is an individual journey, it cannot be accomplished in a vacuum but rather it must take place in the context of relating to others. If not, it would merely be an intellectual undertaking. Therefore, what is discovered intellectually needs to be put into practice behaviorally in order for it to establish roots. Understanding the origin of the emotions, thought patterns, behaviors and expectations can only go so far. Taking it one step further, there must be a corresponding behavioral change in how one relates to others in the here and now. Though there is no guarantee as to the results, it would be for more useful than continuing to be overwhelmed by stress, anger, anxiety and depression.

People don't become who they are without being influenced, for good or not, by outside influences. Being aware of the influences is a step in helping to reframing new thinking and new behavior. In beginning this process, read the following statements and respond with "Agree, Disagree or Uncertain" (A,D,U) and circle the response that most closely reflects thoughts at this point in time.

1.) I feel stressed when dealing with a differences with my partner. A D U

2.) Little things make me angry. A D U

3.) I am too anxious to bring up things that bother me in the relationship. A D U

4.) When angry, I internalize things, they build up and then I explode. A D U

5.) When I am upset about things, I never express how I feel. A D U

6.) Holding things in, makes me feel anxious or depressed. A D U

7.) I feel unappreciated but don't deal with it directly. A D U

Reading through these statements and becoming aware how you respond allows you to closely examine and reflect more deeply on each one. Any statement that brings forth the answer of "Uncertain" may need further exploration that would shed light on reasons for the uncertainly and what needs to be done to make the answers specifically a "Agree" or "Disagree" In thinking about the reasons for particular answers for each, attempt to come up with possible improvement strategies.

5

"Judging by the amount of sad singles, a lot of disappointed people have been left standing on the street corner waiting for the bus marked <u>Perfection</u>."

<div align="right">Donald Kennedy</div>

A. Barriers to couples understanding each other:

One basic condition for successful relationships is for couples to feel validated by each other. Another is for each to feel truly understood and empathized with in spite of differences. Expectations of each should be clearly communicated to each other, understood and agreed upon. However, in far too many relationships these conditions do not happen. This sets the stage for problems down the road of the relationship. Barriers to closeness and intimacy are often the results. The far reaching effect is the deterioration of the physical and emotional wellbeing of each of them (Fincham & Beach, 1999).

It is of no surprise that Fincham and Beach report that dysfunctional mental, physical and family health can adversely affect the level of marital conflict in a relationship and visa versa. Around the issue of mental health, both readily view the link between marital conflict to depression and anxiety. This is compounded when there are alcohol problems in the mix. They claim that physical and psychological abuse can be triggered by drinking. Drinking problems can include, partners who suffer from episodic drinking, binge drinking, out-of-home drinking and drinking limited to weekends only. The functional alcoholic who claims to be able to "handle one's liquor without any problem" is not viewed as exempt by these two theorists.

In addition, they suggest that chronic, unresolved marital conflict can act as possible triggers to certain forms of cancer, cardiac disease such as high blood pressure, and chronic pain such as fibromyalgia. They theorize that chronic hostility during conflict can adversely alter immunological, endocrine and cardiovascular functioning. Although consequential for both husbands and wives, marital conflict is viewed by the theorists as having more pronounced health consequences for wives than their male partners. This is because, women are viewed as internalizing more of the stressors experienced, thus manifesting themselves physically.

Fincham and Beach also report that marital conflict can adversely affect families in ways that include poorer parenting, poorer child adjustment, problematic attachment to parents, increased likelihood of parent-child conflict, and conflict between siblings. Aspects of marital conflict that have a particularly negative influence on children are those when the children are caught between two battling parents. Parents are heard to say that they are resistant to break up an unhealthy relationship because they don't want it to adversely affect the children. However, studies show that children fair much better when the splitting parents work cooperatively for the sake of the children rather than in those homes where the couple are in constant strife but stay together "for the sake of the children." This can adversely affect the child's ability to maintain a healthy family life as an adult.

To create a relationship that is mutually rewarding, there has to be trade offs and tough choices to make. There must be a commitment to put in the necessary time. However, job demands, stress in raising children, extended family pressures are just a few of the many detractions that sap not only time but needed energy. As a result, couples can easily fall back into old habits that are unproductive in dealing with the stressors that are common in most relationships. In the end, repeating these old habits takes more time and energy than if the couple worked as a team and devoted the time to enhancing the relationship from the beginning.

One of the most pronounced features of overly dependent, unhealthy relationships is the use of power to gain some type of misguided control over one's partner (Schaeffer, 1987). As a result of this unconscious, dysfunctional way of thinking, one partner attempts to maintain control over the other. The need to maintain such control stems from more of a sense of insecurity. Without being in control over the partner, life appears tenuous and uncertain. Not having control of the other heightens the anxiety. To lessen the anxiety, expectations of one's partner need to be met. However, couples typically have different expectations of what they each want out of a relationship. Hence, power struggles emerge.

This is exemplified in a passage in Pat Conway's 1987 book, entitled The Prince of Tides where he tries to explain the attempts of man understanding woman. In it, it reads as follows: *"I have tried to understand women and this obsession has left me both enraged and ridiculous. The gulf is too vast and oceanic and treacherous. There is a mountain range between the sexes with no exotic race of Sherpas to translate the enigmas of those deadly slopes that separate us."*

Does this mean bridging the gap is insurmountable or that gaining understanding is impossible? On the contrary, such barriers to understanding and intimacy can be accomplished through an acceptance that the partner is different without making a value judgment. Each partner in the relationship needs to be willing to negotiate getting one's needs met while being sensitive to the needs of the other person.

Christa Reiser (1999) theorizes that problems in relationships surface when men and women continue in their attempt to understand each other from their own point of view as to being open to another viewpoint. As a result, there is far too often opposing self-serving interests that will lead to nothing but struggles for dominance and power. Reiser further theorizes that it would be more helpful if people had a realistic sense of what they want in a relationship and how specifically they intend on achieving their goal. Once this is accomplished, then it must be conveyed to the other person. Many couples want an "equal" and loving relationship but have different definitions of what that means. Many have internalized the modern values of love, equality and intimacy but have no concrete, realistic ideas for achieving these abstract goals. So, instead they typically engage in a power struggle, trying to get the other person to be what they want them to be with no roadmap as how to get here.

Beattie talks about breaking the cycle of being emotionally dominated by others. She recommends doing this by developing a sense of, what she calls, "un-dependency" on others. She states that as long as a person's sense of self is dependent on how the other person treats them, then they have given over power to that other person. She goes on to point out that taking personal responsibility for setting one's goal, as opposed to allowing someone else to do it, is

critical. However, setting one's own goals does not mean tramping on the goals of the partner. It means having the courage to take responsibility for oneself and not abdicate it over to someone else and complaining when it doesn't work as planned (Beattie, 1089).

2. Incongruence between stated goals and implicit agendas;

People are goal oriented whether they consciously realize it or not. They typically work toward something, be it for ultimate good or ill. Even doing nothing becomes a goal in and of itself. In courtships, the ultimate goal usually is to end up in a permanent relationship. In order to reach this goal, people initially put their best foot forward. As a result, the hidden agendas remain hidden until after the "honeymoon is over" and they are well into the relationship. Those who can be open and honest with each other from the beginning and who make the necessary adjustments, can have stable and satisfying relationships. However, those who can't adjust to the changes that surface after "the honeymoon is over" and who get caught up in a power struggle end up in dysfunctional relationships.

Expectations or goals in the relationship are often not understood and are ill defined. Often men and women come together in a relationship with unrealistic or ill defined goals. When the "honeymoon is over", they are lost. At this point, it leads far too often to anger and blame toward each other. Rather than deal with these issues right up front, they are buried deep beneath layers of avoidance, passive aggressive behavior and hurt. Agendas become hidden with unexpressed expectations only to avoid the inevitable breakdown in relationships. It is vitally important to be upfront from the beginning or the nebulousness will come back to haunt the couple.

3 .Taking a dualistic position when dealing with differences;

One of the many challenges in relationships is coming to the realization that issues therein are not as simple as black and white when it comes to one's view of reality. Relationships would be great if couples think, act and view reality in the same way. However, that is not the case. Potential problems arise when two people, though in love, view things differently. When this happens, it is common, to change the other person's way of thinking. When this is resisted by one's partner, feelings of resentment toward the other person may ensue. Far too often, if the one partner reacts or views "reality" differently, them that partner is viewed as wrong, resistant, or even clueless. If the partner does not meet one's expectations then that partner is viewed as needing to change in order to get the relationship on the right on track.

The tendency is to "change" the partner and usually not oneself. The problem is viewed as lying with the partner. Does this mean that one person is right and the other person is wrong? Or can there be a different way of interpreting the same "reality"? It is often difficult for one partner to comprehend one's partner's view as being equally valid as one's own. It is when there is an openness to this possibility that a resolution that works for both can result.

<u>*Case example #12*</u>

Tina reported that her husband Joe had a communication problem. She went on to report that he had never been a great talker but she thought things would change after marriage. However, things had gotten worse. At first she thought Joe's quiet nature manifested a quiet strength. However, now she interpreted it to be distant and uncaring. The more she told him of her dissatisfaction, the more he stated that no matter what he did, she would not be satisfied. The only thing they agreed upon was that they fought over the same old things with no resolution.

Tina grew up in a home where her mother was dissatisfied with her father not turning out to be the man she thought he was when they first met. Through her growing up years, this was Tina's learning experience about relationships and how they should work. She brought this into her marriage and experienced the same results as her mother. Her expectations of her husband after marriage were unrealistic and laid the groundwork for years of unhappiness and dissatisfaction with each other.

It was not a crisis, in and of itself that put Tina's marriage in jeopardy. It was rather the seemingly small things that constantly came to the surface, building up and never getting resolved. The small things that kept coming up, seemingly never resolved. In order to successfully resolve their difference, this couple needed to look deeper under the surface into the unmet needs that never were openly discussed and appropriately resolved.

 This was not a concept for Tina to initially absorb. She questioned her taking responsibility for implementing change within herself when she viewed Joe as the source of all the problems. However, before there would be any chance of the relationship changing for the better, Tina had to be open to changing only her part in the problem and not be fixated on Joe needing to make all the changes. Slowly she began to move away from a right and wrong mentality. Prior to her taking responsibility for making personal changes, she and Joe exemplified the natural tendency to defend oneself. Each did not listen to the other and became entrenched in their own way of viewing reality (Lerner, 1999). The results of continuing this dysfunctional pattern of behavior is easily engage in a power struggle. The end is one feeling like the winner and the other feeling like the loser. This was certainly the case with Tina before she made the necessary changes. Slowly she began to think of Joe as merely being a person with different needs and wants. He was a man coming from a different background, with different life experiences. To the extent that she was able entertain the possibility that Joe was a man with a different view of the world, she was less likely get into a power struggle with him.

For Tina, viewing Joe as different was initially threatening. To her, allowing Joe to be different translated into losing control. Devaluing Joe's uniqueness, made her view of her world as more entrenched. This only resulted in estrangement and alienation. Instead, she began to not place Joe in a position of always being wrong and let go of the unrealistic expectation of his having to be what she wanted him to be. She did this by learning to effectively dialogue with Joe

co-creating an outcome that worked for both. They ended up viewing each other in the relationship as being "different but equal." This could not have happened as long as Tina's needs superseded the needs of Joe. As Tina took responsibility for being in charge of herself and not Joe, he began to make changes in order to adjust to the "new" her.

Soon *Tina and Joe began to relate to each other differently and as a result, began to view each other's needs as valid and worthy of respect, not criticism. From this they began to identify each of their own unique core values and the needs they had within the relationship. Once identified, they began to appropriately negotiate getting each of their needs met while being sensitive to the needs of the other.*

It may be helpful to view relationship like an equal partnership in a business. The relationship is not a business where there is an owner and an employee. Nor is it a business where there is a junior partner and a senior partner. It is a business of equal partners. That means both have equal say in the decision making. Final decisions are to be made through negotiation and compromise. If this consistently is not possible, than the dissolution of the business or in this case the relationship may be considered.

As stated earlier, the everyday issues that couples struggle with are usually a mask hiding the deeper unmet needs not being dealt with. Very often taking a hard look at the deeper unmet needs, a couple can find common ground in wanting the same things. These may include such things as feeling respected and accepted as a person, warts and all. Included are feelings of being validated and valued as a person. It also means being listened to and heard. This does not necessarily mean being agreed with but rather being given full attention, eye contact and conveying a sense of understanding without being judgmental.

Truly listening means not only feeding back the content of what has been said but also being aware of the nonverbal cues which includes the accompanying emotional and physical affect. It is important that both people in the communication process are on the same page, with the sender of the message clear as to not only the content but also as to the true meaning behind the message and the receiver understanding the true intent of the message being sent. (Weeks and Treat, 2001)

A common problem occurs when the sender gives mixed verbal and nonverbal messages and then denies that such messages were sent due to lack of awareness. Assuming the receiver has accurately detected a discrepancy between the verbal and nonverbal message and reflected it back, the sender may continue to deny it has occurred. For example a husband may deny he is angry, although his nonverbal behavior reveals otherwise. In this case his wife needs to feed back what specifically in her husband's message gives her the impression that he is angry. If he continues to deny such feelings, she, as the listener, may do well not to press the matter, but rather make note of how his words do not match his behavior (Weeks and Treats, 2001).

Remember to never lose sight of the fact that both you and your partner are unique individuals with your own set of needs, though different but equally unique. Toxic to any relationship is negativity which left unchecked will kill a relationship. Catching the other person

doing something right and expressing sincere appreciation will help to solidify the relationship. Hendrix (2008) recommends that couples move from a judgmental way of thinking to a more appreciative way of thinking. What he stresses is not only an appreciation of the other person but also of oneself. He recognizes the importance of self appreciation, viewing it as a gateway in appreciating others. He defines it as follows.

> - Appreciation is a form of self- acceptance
> - Appreciation is a form of self- nurturing
> - Appreciation creates emotional and physical safety
> - Appreciation helps us to live more fully
> - Appreciation is finding what's right with the world

4. Explicitly wanting change and implicitly resisting change;

It has been said that people want to lose weight but few want to diet and exercise. This certainly illustrates the struggle between wanting something and doing the necessary work consistently and diligently to achieve it. This is equally true when it comes to changing behavior in order to achieve and maintain a healthy relationship. Many people fear change because they view the end goal as too difficult to achieve and it would bring them out of their comfort zone. They fail to understand that the ultimate cannot be achieved in one fell swoop but rather through small manageable steps. Taking the small steps results in small successes, which results in achieving the ultimate goal as much more achievable. (Lerner, 1999).

Couples in problem relationships often view their partners as the ones needing to change. Typically they see their only "fault" to be that they put up with their partners' dysfunctional behavior. When it is brought up that in order to improve the relationship they also need to take a hard look at themselves and risk personal change, it is met with resistance. They respond with, "Why should I have to change, when the problem lies with him/her?" They fail to realize that if they change, their partner will have to change as well in order to adjust to the "new dynamics." The possible downside to this way of thinking is that there is no guarantee as to how the partner may change. He or she may get worse in reaction to the "new dynamics." With no guarantee that changing will bring forth the results hoped for, decreases the motivation to go through the initial stress associated with change.

The bottom line is that people can not change a resistant partner. They would have better luck and it would be healthier to begin by changing themselves. Therefore wanting to change the relationship but explicitly resisting changing oneself is fraught with disaster. By continuing the same old behavior and expecting different results truly is insanity.

Self change may be resisted because the problem may be viewed as only coming from the partner. Resistance to self change may also result from the belief that it would not guarantee positive change from one's partner. This is true but it does offer possibilities. Continuing the same dysfunctional dyad will only guarantee more of the same frustration and unhappiness.

57

Besides, working on oneself provides opportunities to move toward being in charge of oneself rather than giving up that responsibility.

Case example #13

     Dale reported that her husband Mark treated her as if her needs, opinions, desires didn't exist apart from his. He even wanted her to dress and behave in ways he thought were appropriate whenever they went out to socialize. He always was right up front expressing his opinions, never thinking about what hers may be. She felt extremely frustrated and irritated with him but never expressed it directly for fear he would become angry with her. She thought she shouldn't have to tell her husband anyway. She thought that he should readily recognize that he was selfishly putting his needs above hers.

     In exploring further, it was ascertained that in growing up, Dale's mother behaved in much the same fashion. Her mother would parade her in front of friends, expecting her to portray the image of a good, well behaved little girl. The implicit rule in the house was to never question mom or else you would be emotionally punished.

     Dale was able to recognize that her relationship with Mark was a repeated pattern from her early childhood. Because of this recognition and the emotional discomfort she was experiencing, she wanted the situation to change. However, she wanted the change to come forth from Mark. Dale did not want to experience possible rejection from Mark if she attempted to express how his behavior was affecting her. Dale wanted it both ways. She wanted change to take place but she was resistant to the discomfort of being the initial change agent.

     Dale had to reach a point when the emotional pain of staying the same was greater than initially being uncomfortable with risking new behaviors. Recognizing that she couldn't change Mark directly but only could change herself. This was an important first step. Braiker reports that continuing with the same dysfunctional behavioral pattern only reinforces the aggressive and unstable behavior of one's partner (Braiker, 1976).   This was becoming the case with Mark. Dale was finding him more and more demanding. Knowing that she could not directly change Mark, Dale began examining things she could implement herself for herself.

     Being fixated on how Mark needed to change only reinforced Dale's sense of powerlessness, victimization and depression. She weighed her options. She could decide on separation or divorce from Mark. However, choosing either of these options was fraught with problems of their own. Leaving Mark would mean raising the children a good part of the time alone. She and the children would have to move to another location, in perhaps a different school district. Besides she still loved Mark. She held onto the good times they had during their early years together. If she were to leave him, without changing herself, she would merely repeat the pattern with someone else. Therefore, ending the relationship or continuing the same old dysfunctional ways of relating held no appeal for her. Changing herself was viewed by her as her only viable option.

Taking responsibility for personal change, presented Dale with a tremendous opportunity to become empowered in her own right. Changing the ways she responded to Mark had a powerful impact on how he behaved toward her. Slowly she began to believe that she did not deserve to be treated as she was. As her sense of self improved, so did her assertiveness. She began to say "no" to Mark's demands, in spite of initially feeling uneasy with her change.

Initially Mark's response was to increase his demands. As he discovered that Dale would not respond in her usual subservient way, he began to back off. It was discovered that Mark needed Dale more than she thought. His need to control her was in actuality a response to his fear of losing her. Once he realized that Dale being her own person didn't mean she would leave him, he began to relate to her more positively.

This is a clear cut case of a wife asserting herself and her partner positively adjusting to the change in her new action. What are the possible outcomes if one partner makes a change and the other refuses to accept this and becomes more entrenched? If this is the case, I see only three options. One, stay in the relationship and revert back to the former dysfunctional way of interacting. Two, if the reasons are sufficient and appear valid, stay in the relationship and learn to adjust by taking on strategies and techniques that work for you, until such time that is no longer the case. Three, realize and accept that the two of you are too different in needs and values to stay together. This last option may seem like the most drastic and emotional uncomfortable but continuing on in a toxic environment is a tremendous waste of valuable time and energy in one' life.

In order for people like her to change, means developing the courage to implement appropriate strategies that would balance their own needs with those of their partners. This process has the greatest chance of success if implemented in small increments. They should be small enough to be psychologically doable yet great enough to result in a bit of emotional stretching. Behavioral changes that are doable and yet begin to break the negative cycle include the following.

➢ Repeat to yourself that you are worth more and deserve more in life.
➢ Take responsibility <u>only</u> for your own part in the problem and not for those of your partner.
➢ Be careful not to engage in a power struggle with your partner were it will result in a winner and a loser.
➢ Acknowledge when your partner is right and use it as a springboard for personal relational changes.

5. *Dysfunctional ways of communicating;*

Patterns relationships take are dependent, in part, on the personalities of the individuals in those relationships. Patterns in each relationship also depend on other factors that include external influences, intrinsic defense mechanisms internalized from childhood, individual

temperament, intelligence and unique attitudes and values. These patterns push each relationship in a particular direction. Over time being together, couples develop their own unique overall relationship pattern. This unique pattern not only affects the complexion of the relationship but also the personalities of the individuals that make up the relationship.

Case example #14

John and Mary are married. John complained that Mary was too hard on him. He thought that she, expected too much of him. An example of this is when Mary came home from work and John was home ahead of her, she complained that he would fail to acknowledge her. He would merely continue what he was doing when she walked in. It could be continuing to watching television or continue on the computer. Mary thought it would be nice if John made some type of positive acknowledgement when she came home each day.

John thought Mary was being unreasonable and demanding. He explained that at times circumstances presented themselves in such a way that such a greeting would be difficult to say the least. He often needed to unwind after a hard day at work and often would become engrossed in television watching or being on the computer. He thought his wife was unreasonable in her expectation.

However, it was soon revealed that Mary had not been entirely clear as to what was behind her expectation. She finally revealed, after some introspection, that as a child her parents, particularly her mother constantly criticized her, finding fault with much that she did no matter how hard she tried to please her. It got so that whenever she got home and walked through the door she would know immediately where she stood by the look on her mother's face. It was only when her mother positively greeted her that she would feel relaxed and approved of. Hence this old unhealed wound from her past had been carried into the relationship John. When John understood this, he no longer felt victimized by his wife or that she was picking on him.

John began to understand that Mary's expression of anger was just a defense to hide a deeper feeling of fear of possible rejection. Mary was also able to recognize that her expressed anger protected her from emotions she felt ill equipped to handle. She was able to understand the connection between past unresolved issues and how they unconsciously get played out in current relationship. Slowly Mary began to realize that John was not like her mother. With this new understanding, she began to trust more and take risks in clearly communicating her needs without attacking John. John, in turn, was able to listen and respond to her needs without becoming defensive. Though better understanding from both came forth clearer communication and eventual a mutually supportive relationship.

The dysfunctional pattern of communicating described in the above example of John and Mary is far too typical with many couples in relationships. People are creatures of habit and they bring those habits into the relationship, coloring the relationship, as well as how they view themselves. Because of these learned habits, it is not unusual for couples to organize their thoughts and feelings about disagreements around a particular unconscious set of meanings and interpretations (Fincham & Beach, 1999). More often than not, as stated before, these stem from

early childhood experiences. A suggestion can be interpreted as criticism. A simple "no" can be interpreted as a rejection. It is crucial that couples understand that feelings generally attributed to their partners, can have their roots from past experiences in growing up. Understanding the connection between early childhood experiences and the responses to the current behaviors can decrease the amount of negativity in relationships.

Partners on the receiving end of negativity need to understand that they can not only be victims but also creators of their own emotional pain. Though they can not be responsible for their partners' behavior, they are responsible for how they interpret and react to that perceived hostility (Erber & Gilmour, 1994). Feeling victimized usually speaks more about the receiver's early upbringing than it does about the intent of the sender.

Dysfunctional patterns will repeat themselves without the self- understanding and self-responsibility it takes to look at these patterns differently. With understanding, couples can be open to different ways of behaving toward one another.

In attempting to break old worn out destructive patterns, it is important that couples realize that with any new behavior they will go one step forward and two steps back. The reason is that when learning new behavior there is a tendency to resist change, even if it is positive in nature. Therefore, it is not unusual for there to be initial relapses while making efforts to go forward. When this happens, couples can become discouraged, failing to realize that new behaviors do not flow smoothly in a straight line. This is where practice and perseverance holds precedence with the clear goal of a positive relationship in the forefront.

6. Behavior resulting in cognitive distortions about others and self;

Behaviors such as infidelity, abuse and addiction have dramatic affects on relationships. However, it's really the day-in day-out stressors and irritants that wear a couple down in the long run. Behavior that was suppressed or minimized during the early stages of the relationship become irritating behaviors after the "honeymoon stage" is over.

These irritants are legion. They range from not picking up after oneself, to not helping enough around the house or from not being satisfied with the level of performance of the other, to being too obsessed with cleaning or from criticizing too much, to not being able to take criticism. The list goes on and on.

The response to such irritating behaviors is mixed and varied. (Engel, 2002) Typically the offending partners are viewed as inconsiderate and self- absorbed. The theory held by the offended persons is that if the partner really cared about being offensive, he or she would not behave in such an irritating manner. The thought never occurs to them that the behavior exhibited may be unrelated to what is going on in the here and now. When not properly dealt with, the irritating behavior gets repeated without proper resolution. This often results in endless power struggles that result in no-win situations. By focusing on the small irritating behaviors, the real underlying relational problems get lost and consequently never get addressed.

As couples get well into the relationship, it is not unusual for one or both not to feel appreciated for what they do in the relationship. Typically, they report their efforts going unnoticed or taken for granted. They complain about not feeling appreciated or valued by their partner. This can easily lead to misinterpretation of the intent of the other person. Regardless of whether the interpretation is accurate or not, the results are less than positive. Not checking for accuracy can lead to resentment and hostility.

Case example #15

Liz complained that Wayne, her husband was always second guessing what she was doing. An example of this was his insisting that she call him when she was out or that he would double check chores she did around the house. His behavior was considered controlling by her and she resented him for it. In reviewing her family history, Liz reported that this was not new for her. She went on to report that when growing up, her mother would always second guess her and check up on her. Her mother often questioned the motives for her doing what she did. This resulted with Liz growing up feeling insecure and unsure of herself. She thought that she never quite measured up to her mother's standards. As an adult, Liz struggled with the same issues with her husband. As try as she may, she always felt criticized and micromanaged by him.

Slowly Liz began to understand was what she saw as criticism and a need to control was in actuality her husband's way of dealing with his own insecurities and need to feel safe that his world was routine and predictable. When he felt more secure in his world, his anxiety decreased. The couple began to dig deeper into their own underlying unmet needs and discussed them openly and honestly.   As a result, Liz began to break through the cycle of misinterpreting the motives of Wayne's behavior. Irritation and defensiveness gave way to understanding and acceptance. This strengthened the likelihood of each meeting the other's needs. Liz began to feel secure in knowing the Wayne truly loved her and wanted her to be happy. Wayne was able to let go and trust in himself more and know that Liz would not abandon him.

Remember that irritating behavior often arise out of differences between two people over the misinterpretation of those differences. It's common for couples to attribute the intent of their partner's behavior on past experiences they had with others. As a result, they distort reality and become irritated by behavior they perceive as wrong or malevolent in intent. Once people get into these distorted ways of thinking, a breakdown in communication is inevitable. This usually leads to irritation, resentment and hostility. It would be better to challenge these ways of thinking by examining the validity of each rather than blindly accepting them as true.

It is important for people to be aware of how they express their emotions and feelings to their partners in order to avoid misinterpretations. This, in turn, will avoid unnecessary conflict. When people begin to pay attention to the literal meaning of what they say, they can realize the extent of their sloppy usage and how often it leads to confusion in close relationships (Fisher, 2004).

Fisher theorizes that the subconscious may be an important factor in how people communicate. He goes on to state that the subconscious is very literal in the way it translates language. Therefore when people speak to each other, the subconscious is also hearing the words. The subconscious hearing the words and interpreting them literally, may result in internal and external reactions the speakers never intended.

Fisher illustrates this by using the example of communicating an emotion. In it he points out how the unconscious mind literally interprets the meaning of someone saying, "I am angry at you". When, "I am angry," is said, the unconscious mind understands this to literally mean the total person is always angry. In other words, to the unconscious mind, anger becomes the person's total identity. What the person meant to say when this thought was communicated was, "I feel anger with what you did." This phrase takes a few more words to state, but it's much more accurate.

The most accurate way to express emotions is with the verb *feel*, not *be*. Feel anger, but don't "be" or "become" angry. People can also "feel" more than one emotion at a time, but it is difficult to "be" more than one emotion at a time. To further clarify what is meant, the speaker should add a second part to the sentence by saying, "with what you did". This second part addresses the issue of the action of the person, rather than the person himself.   Communicating what is meant accurately is more authentic yet at times takes courage. The reason for this is that the speaker now has to take full responsibility for the message being sent.

7. Food for thought;

The impact that lack of communicating one's own needs clearly in a relationship can not be minimized. People typically look to others to fulfill their unmet needs without clearly defining to themselves and to the other people what they are. Instead, they communicate vague messages that can easily be misinterpreted. Later, when those ill defined needs are not met by others, resentment and hostility come forth. However, to the extent that people can have a clearer understanding of their needs in a relationship and be open and honest about expressing them then true intimacy and personal growth can take place.

Often in a frantic effort to unrealistically look to one's partner to fulfill unmet needs, many of the early warning signs in the relationship either get minimized or ignored. As a result, as the relationship becomes deeper, feelings toward the other person becomes more intense. Once the early stage of the relationship or "honeymoon stage" has passed, many of the potentially harmful behaviors exhibited by the partner begin to surface. However, love has taken hold and leaving the relationship becomes less of an option. As a result, the couple ends up tolerating the intolerable, hoping against hope that somehow the partner will become once again that "knight in shining armor" or "beautiful princess" that once existed in their minds.

To change this vicious cycle, these couples need to clearly articulate clearly each of their needs and expectations. Going further, they need to negotiate how and when these needs and expectations will be met. If they can not come to an explicit agreement, then they should

seriously consider terminating the relationship. Though this option would be initially emotionally painful, in the long run it would eliminate significantly more hardship in the long run.

In order to eliminate cognitive distortions in relationships, the following questions should be pondered.

➢ Are needs communicated clearly in the relationship and if not, why not?
➢ Is there continuous misinterpretation of the partner's intent in the communication?
➢ If so, what can be done to change this?
➢ How much in the relationship do one's thoughts affect behavior?
➢ How much do the thoughts about oneself affect the relationship?

Typically, the style of upbringing one has affects the messages one gives oneself, how one views oneself and the kind of choices one makes in relationships. Kindly respond to the following statements by circling Agree, Disagree or Uncertain (A, D, U). By doing so the reader will be able to determine how past upbringing can influence present thought and behavior.

1.) My behavior reminds me of my father or mother. A D U

2.) My partner reminds me of my father or mother. A D U

3.) In growing up I often felt that I fell short of my parents' expectations. A D U

4.) What I think about myself today is affected by what my parents thought of me. A D U

5.) I consider myself abused as a child. A D U

6.) As a child I was recognized for what I did as opposed to who I was. A D U

7.) In my relationship, I feel treated as the child. A D U

In going through these statements, closely examine and reflect more deeply on each one. Any statement that brings forth the answer of "Uncertain" may need further exploration that would shed light on reasons for the uncertainly and what needs to be done to make the answers specifically a "Agree" or "Disagree" In thinking about the reasons for particular answers for each, attempt continue to come up with possible improvement strategies.

6

" I do what I don't want to do and don't do what I want to do."
                                        - Paul; 2 Corinthians

A. The interplay between a poorly developed sense of oneself and a poor understanding of one's relations with another:

Unresolved issues from the past tend to adversely affect how people feel about themselves and in turn adversely affect how they relate to others. Conversely, if the relationship is dysfunctional, it can adversely affect how the individuals in that relationship view themselves. Hence one can not separate the person, as a unique, individual from one who is intrinsically involved in a relationship, when talking about living a life that is balanced and fulfilled.

1. Looking to have unfulfilled needs met by the other person;

Few people grow up in picture perfect worlds. More often than not parents try to do the best they could with what they had to work with. Parenting is often a learned as you go process with many parents ill equipped for the job. As a result, it is not unusual for some people to be emotionally wounded on some level. Depending on how wounded these people are, they will attempt to get their prior unmet needs met through current relationships.

Attempting to fulfill these unmet needs through one's partner can occur in various ways. People can get into repeated relationships, looking to feel loved but since childhood, never feeling worthy of it. They can also idealize their partners and give up their own authenticity in hopes of not being abandoned as they were as children. The list can go on and on.

Looking to one's partner to fulfill unmet needs is not necessarily a bad thing. Being in a mutually supportive relationship can assist in healing the past wounds. As Hendrix (2008) so aptly puts it, when couples can empathize, validate and accept the differences in their partners, it can lay the foundation addressing the basic needs of each.

Far too often individuals in relationships do not articulate their unmet needs or may not even be aware of them on a conscious level. The unmet needs here are the ones that can best be met through a relationship. They may include the need to feel validated and viewed as important by the partner. It may also include a need for intimacy that may be defined differently by each of the partners in the relationship. They may include a need to feel loved abstractly such as through a touch or a caress rather than concretely by working many hours out of the home in order to support a family. Regardless, it is critical that these individuals become aware of exactly what their needs are before they can appropriately negotiate getting those needs met within the relationship. To be successful in this endeavor, people need to likewise respect the unmet needs of the other person as well.

2. Ignoring the warning signs in order to hold onto the relationship;

People generally have a basic set of beliefs about themselves and the world around them. However, when they get into relationships, they can be confronted by "realities" that may be contradictory and incompatible with their own. What adds to the confusion is that these alternate views of reality have a multitude of plausible competing explanations. As a result, there can be a tendency, especially during those early stages of relationships, for the mind to filter out or deny the existence of a different reality embraced by their partner. Denial may decrease initial stress levels that can be experienced if faced with an alternate reality. However, in the long run, it makes maintaining a stable relationship that much more difficult.

Asher (1992) theorizes that there is a cognitive mechanism that makes possible for people to be able to process and integrate ambiguities and incongruence of verbal and behavioral messages without undue stress. People can readily rationalize a behavior that best explains the world as they understand it to be. This is opposed to thinking that another reality may exist with equal validity. This is seen in its most extreme state in highly opinionated, dogmatic persons. Examples of these extremes in thinking manifest itself within the political bases of the Republican and Democratic parties. The rigid partisan beliefs make negotiating differences next to impossible. Seeing another reality that may be different than their own view becomes too threatening.

This manifests this in relationships when people view others through an emotional prism that distorts reality in order to maintain a set of beliefs that are most congruent with our own. As a consequence, many couples can be locked into engaging in persistent self-defeating thoughts and behaviors they may consider "normal". This type of thinking and subsequent behavior is far too common in abusive relationships of various types. It is often witnessed when one or both parties in the relationship rationalize highly dysfunctional behavior that is very evident to those around them.

Berglas and Baumeister(1993) illustrated this type of dysfunctional behavior referring to a case involving Francine Hughes. Ms. Hughes is well known, largely because of Faith McNulty's nonfiction account of it in *The Burning Bed*, and the subsequent Farrah Fawcett movie of the same name.

"At age sixteen, Francine married Mickey Hughes, a young man who soon became physically violent and abusive. Her life with him was a saga of beatings and rages that continued for over a decade, during which she suffered terribly. Frequently the small family (for they had several children) was evicted for failing to pay rent, and Mickey's absences ranged from overnight disappearances (for drinking binges and sexual infidelities) to brief periods of incarceration. Francine had many opportunities to leave him and in fact did leave him several times, but she always returned.

She divorced him but soon resumed living with him and supporting him financially. Later, looking back, she acknowledged that she could and should have left him and stayed away, but she kept returning to him when he apologized and promised to reform. She thought that if she could act in the right way, she might be able to prevent him from beating her. The relationship ended only when, after receiving a beating followed by sexual intercourse, she poured gasoline

all over the floor of the bedroom in which he was sleeping and set fire to the house. Mickey was killed in the fire. Instead of finding herself free, however, Francine was indicted for murder; and to avoid a long prison term, she had to convince the jury that she had temporarily gone insane." If insanity meant holding onto a benign belief that clearly was contrary to the abusive reality she was experiencing, then she was indeed "insane". It is unfortunate that her integrating a new reality resulted in the death of her husband.

Berglas and Bauneister (1993) point out that there were good periods in the relationship, although they became briefer and rarer. This reinforced Francine's beliefs as to how she perceived what kind of man Mickey was. She was heavily invested in maintaining the concept she had of the relationship. It began with her dropping out of high school and having her first sexual experience with Mickey and then building as a couple by having children. Mickey's apologies were often spoken with conviction and feeling, and they were often followed by significant improvements in his behavior, although only for a while. On one occasion when Francine seemed quite serious about leaving him, Mickey even joined a church and Alcoholics Anonymous, convincing her that she should try again to make the relationship succeed. She was committed to believing he was all the good things she wanted in a relationship.

Francine's story can be viewed as extreme, but it does illustrate how the mind can filter out a reality that differs from what people are subconsciously programmed to see. Far more common are the relationships where one of the partners is fixated on tolerating a dysfunctional relationship. This person refuses to believe there is an alternate reality of the partner and continuously filtering in only the "reality" that coincides with the already existing belief system.. As a result, the mind often rationalizes away the warning signs, no matter how blatantly obvious, as the Hughes case shows.

Poor self- esteem can contribute to problems of persistently staying in destructive relationships. When the early warning signs become evident, people with high self-esteem are sometimes able to size things up more quickly than people who lack self-esteem. High self-esteem enables people to say, "This is getting me nowhere" or "Things are only getting worse, not better," or "I deserve better than this". Appeasing or making excuses for inappropriate or hurtful behavior is not good for either of the parties. Beginning to view themselves as worthy of more, may result in being able to leave such a highly dysfunctional relationship. Continuing to ignore or make excuses for maladaptive behavior from one's partner, only leads to a chronic unhappiness and lack of personal and relational fulfillment.

3. Codependency;

In Melody Beattie's book, Codependent No More (1992), she writes that there are many definitions of co-dependency. She refers to Robert Subby's (1984) definition as "an emotional, psychological, and behavioral condition that develops as a result of an individual's psychological exposure to, and practice of, a set of oppressive rules. These rules prevent the open expression of feelings as well as the direct discussion of personal and interpersonal problems." Subby stated that the concept originally was used to describe persons whose lives were affected as a result of their being involved with someone who was chemically dependent. The codependent partner was thought to be in a relationship with an alcohol or chemical dependent individual. As a reaction to such an individual, the codependent developed a pattern of coping with life that was not healthy. Obviously, many people can relate to current and past relationships that manifest

this type of behavior without it being related to alcohol.

Beattie cites another codependent specialist Ernie Larson (1985) by quoting his definition as being, "Those self- defeating, learned behaviors or character defects that result in a diminished capacity to initiate or to participate in loving relationships."

There are almost as many definition of codependency as there are behaviors that manifest them. Regardless of the exact definition, they all pretty much agree on the basic characteristics. These characteristics include individual emotional, psychological and /or behavioral limitations that results from habitual environmental pressures that squelch authenticity. Having these characteristics does not necessarily mean that the codependent is defective or inferior. These people rather have wired from early childhood to manifest a behavior that hampers optimal emotional and psychological growth. This learned behavior may be the result of their interpretation of messages given them by various authority figures when growing up. Other influences may be come from societal messages as to what were desirable male or female traits. Still others could come from messages from books and motion pictures. Here relationships can be portrayed in such a way that it makes it difficult to separate reality from fantasy. However, most engrained traits stem from the early childhood influences of their primary caretakers and other people in authority. Though codependency has generally been attributed to women, this characteristic is evident in men as well. There are a significant number of men dependent on their partner or significant other to determine what they do and how they do it.

Though codependency can be viewed as many things, the core essence is an inordinate dependency on others to define who they are. There is a dependency on another person's moods, behaviors, sicknesses or well-being, and their love. However, it is a paradoxical dependency. Codependents appear to be ones in relationships who are dependent on the other. In actuality the other person in the relationship is equally dependent. In these types of relationships, these partners can appear to look strong, yet their strength is derived in making the other feel weak. These relationships become parasitic in nature with one partner feeding off the other.

Beattie (1992) points out that people who are codependent typically have grown up with parents or other primary caretakers who did not provide a trusting, safe and protective environment. As a result, they don't trust others or their own feelings and decisions. Because they hadn't been given the necessary foundation of unconditional love, they have difficulty thinking they deserve good things for themselves. As a consequence, they repeat dysfunctional patterns of relating to others well into their adulthood. The codependent person can internalize angry feelings that they cannot appropriately express. They become anxious of their own and other people's anger. They can be prone to tears, depression and physical illnesses. They are usually hypersensitive to possible rejection. They have a tendency of getting into relationships that go nowhere. However, they continue to tolerate the intolerable, thinking things will get better. On a deeper level, they feel they don't deserve better. Their struggles with current dysfunctional relationships are also vain attempts to heal and rework what was never resolved in early childhood. Developing a better sense of self can break this vicious cycle. This process, like other forms of change, takes time. However, small consistent steps toward taking charge of oneself instead of continuing to allow others to take charge will bring forth the desired results.

4. Viewing the other person as an extension of oneself;

Imagine one partner in a room watching a television program that is on channel "3" and the other partner is in another room watching a television program on channel "4." Though each partner is watching different programs, each is unaware of this. Each mistakenly thinks both are watching the same program on the same channel.

Now the couple is asked to describe to each other what they see on the television. This is without each realizing that the other is viewing a different program. It would be reasonable to assume that each will be experiencing frustration with the partner describing a different reality without understanding why?

This similarly goes on in relationships, where one partner mistakenly believes the other views the world in a similar manner. The following case example illustrates this point.

Case example #16

Joe and June were newlyweds but already there were signs of problems. Joe did not have an extensive dating pattern prior to meeting June. When he met June she showered him with love and affection. June was very accomplished in her profession and appeared to have all the traits that Joe was looking for in a relationship. As the relationship evolved, there were signs that all was not what it appeared to be.

June came from an intact family with her father a corporate executive and mother a "stay-at-home mom." However, it became clear that June's sister Mary was dad's favorite and her brother Tom was mom's favorite. This left June striving to be accepted as an equal in the family fold. June was constantly striving to behave in such a way that would win approval from her parents.

This continued once she got married. However, by this time, June now wanted Joe to behave in ways that would also win her parents approval. In order for Joe to accomplish this, he needed to be the kind of person June thought he should be. If he resisted, not seeing things as she did, June was confused and frustrated. It was difficult to understand that Joe experienced a different reality than she did. It was not until the couple reached a crisis state that June began to realize that Joe was not an extension of her. He had different needs and wants. Until June realized that was different and accepted him as such, their marriage would continue to be in serious trouble.

June also slowly began to realize that no matter what she did or what type of husband she had, she wouldn't be able to gain her parents' approval. This had nothing to do with her but rather was an issue her parents needed to resolve themselves. She began to realize that in order for her and Joe to have a solid marriage, they needed identities as separate individuals as well as an identity as a couple. Unless this happened, the couple would a dissolution with marriage and with each other.

Case example #17

Similarly Ted was complaining that Carol had no life of her own. She did very little on her own separate from her husband. As a result, whenever he wanted to go out with his friends at work, she would give him a hard time. She couldn't understand how Ted, being a married man, would want to spend time doing things separate from her. Her self- esteem problems as well as her dependency needs kept her from seeing another reality besides her own. The pressures placed on Ted were pushing him emotionally further away from her.

Slowly, Carol began to build a more positive self esteem. She began developing her own interests. This was difficult at first. This was due, in part, to the fact that she had put so much energy into unconsciously seeing Ted as an extension of herself. Carol began to understand that in order to ensure the greatest chance of relational success, she needed to focus on self development rather than attempting to make Ted see the world as she did.

5. Unexpressed expectations and needs from the onset of the relationship;

In relationships, there are often unexpressed expectations one partner has of the other. As the relationship develops and problems arise, it is not unusual for one partner to state, "You knew how I was when we first started dating. So why are you complaining now?" The answer usually is, "I thought you would change." or "I thought you were different." Thinking the other person will change or not being aware the differences are common themes. The reasons vary. They can include not fully conceptualizing their expectations in the beginning. Also, included is the avoidance of possible conflict. Minimizing or denying the differences can be another reason.

It is not unusual for couples to think in generalities and not in specifics. Expectations, especially during the early stages in a relationship, are typically superficially thought about. Rarely is there a digging into one's self and asking those serious questions about needs and wants. Also, if conflict was avoided in early childhood then discussing differences in adult relationships are not readily expressed. Initially romantic emotions take hold, making it that much more difficult to be open and honest about expectations for fear of losing one's partner. Couples instead tend to rationalize that their communication is clear and that both see things similarly. Typically couples report that each of their expectations and goals in the relationship are implicitly and explicitly understood. However, as Cahn (1994) brings out, couples do not always accurately communicate their expectations or goals in the beginning of the relationship. This often leads to problems down the road.

Case example #18

Susan was feeling very distraught. Her boyfriend Philip had left her for another woman. She went on to report the he was different than any man she had ever gone out with. He was fun to be with. They liked doing much of the same things together. Their relationship was seen as passionate. Things began to change after her father became ill, took a turn for the worst and died. This was an especially dark time for Susan. She looked to Philip for support and understanding and instead she sensed an emotional distancing on his part. It became clear that as long as the couple were relating to each other on a surface level, the relationship flourished. As soon as something deeper was called for, the cracks began to become visible. Philip could relate very well as long as they continued in the "honeymoon" stage of the relationship. As soon as more was called for, the "honeymoon" was quickly over.

Clearly, the expectations of Susan and Phillip were different in the relationship. Susan was expecting something deeper. She mistakenly thought that Philip would be there in good times and bad. Philip was great on the surface but was not committed to anything beyond having a good time. The relationship dissolved. However, Susan now sees the importance of being clear about expectations in the early stages of future relationships.

For many couples, the initial fun brings out warm, comfortable feelings. It's only later when the underlying, deeper needs come to the surface that some couples have a difficult time. Goals and expectations are not always clear to the couples themselves. As with Susan and Philip, circumstances may bring to the surface other expectations later causing damage that may be too great to save the relationship. Clear communication is a must in order to achieve relational balance and harmony. When this is not achieved, then arguments ensue.

Cahn claims that disagreements can be a good thing if they can end with successfully resolving conflict and clarifying goals and expectations before it leads to dysfunctional behavior. Even heated discussions can flush out irrational beliefs, uncompromising points of view and beforehand implicit expectations of the relationship. Heated discussions in this case do not denote irrational expression of hostility. Cahn rather views them as a vehicle for open understanding of similar and dissimilar expectations. This can then provide the ground work for negotiating a resolution of their differences. Being upfront in the very beginning of the relationship will minimize the intensity of disagreements later. However, for both members of the couple to be open and honest from the beginning of the relationship can be difficult at best. This is especially true when one or both have underlying issues that they have not worked through or may not be aware of. More often than not, that's where counseling can help.

6. Unrealistic expectations of self and/or other in the relationship;

As previously stated, it is not unusual for couples to get into relationships with certain expectations that normally don't come out until after the "honeymoon" is over. When the initial stages of the relationship are over, disappointments begin to surface. Albert Ellis (1997) named these disappointments, "irrational ideas." His concepts are manifested in many ways. Though they do not bring forth the results sought, they are repeated often in various dysfunctional relationships. The list below may make people aware of possible "irrational ideas" that may impede their own relationships.

➢ **My partner must accept my behavior, no matter what.**

There are people in relationships who equate love with acceptance of any type of behavior exhibited. An example of this is when one partner views it as acceptable behavior when primary importance is placed on extended family, friends or going out having a good time over the relationship. When the other partner has a problem with this type of behavior, the response in this example usually is that this was the way the person always was and that other party should accept it and stops complaining.

➢ **I must be the perfect partner, doing everything perfectly.**

These are the people in relationships who push themselves to the limits, rarely ask for

71

help and are forever cheerful. Their sense of self is based on what they do as opposed to who they are. They constantly strive to give to the relationship perfectly and have no thought about giving to themselves. The approval of the other person in the relationship over rides everything else

➢ **If I feel wronged then the other person needs to be punished.**

In certain relationships if one person feels victimized by the other, then that other person is considered the villain, deserving to be punished in some way. This can be manifested by the alleged victim becoming distant or withdrawing love and affection. In this example, the alleged victim does not take any responsibility for the problems in the relationship but reserves that for the other person.

➢ **My partner must fulfill my expectations.**

This occurs when a person has expectations of the other in the relationship and when those expectations are not met the person views there being something inherently wrong with the other person. An example would be when a partner fails to fulfill the expectations of the other, resulting in the other no longer feeling loved.

➢ **My feelings of unhappiness are caused by my partner.**

This is when there is no personal responsibility for one's unhappiness in the relationship but rather it is the fault of the other person. When there is a disagreement, it invariably is the other person's fault and the other person needs to change. When the other person changes, then the unhappy person will be happy again.

➢ **Problems in a relationship are never discussed or talked about.**

In many relationships, image is more important than substance. Conflict is avoided at all cost. Problems are swept under the carpet and suppressed rather than dealt with. To deal with such conflict would be viewed as too threatening to the status quo of the relationship.

➢ **I need to be in a relationship, in order to feel whole.**

There are people who stay in highly dysfunctional relationships with no real attempt at changing things because they don't want to risk ending up alone. The fear of abandonment is too great. As a result, their sense of self is tied up with who they're with. Growing up and taking personal responsibility for changing oneself becomes too threatening.

➢ **If my partner has a problem, it is my responsibility to fix it.**

There are those in relationships who take it upon themselves to fix any problem, right any wrong that may manifest itself within the relationship. This goes beyond normal concern but rather reaches the point of spending too much time trying to fix things for the other person and not enough time listening and understanding where other person is at.

➢ **I have a right to blurt out my feelings regardless of hurting others.**

There are those who think that marriage or the equivalent gives them permission to no longer filter out potentially hurtful or harmful comments. They freely express themselves whenever the spirit moves them regardless of the hurt feelings left behind. Their lack of basic social skills hampers their ability to see others as being different with different ways of viewing their world.

Irrational ideas can lead to unrealistic expectations of self and others in relationships. This in turn can result in the thwarting of what is most desired by all concerned. These couples are missing out on true intimacy and the opportunity to take personal responsibility to be their authentic self. Instead of being honest with themselves, they end up protecting a false identity developed over years of dysfunctional programming.

7. Food for Thought;

Summary

People typically report when they find themselves in dysfunctional relationships, "If only I knew then, what I know now, I would not have gotten myself into this situation." More often than not they did know but either disregarded the "red flags", minimized their existence or push the thoughts down into the unconscious mind. They rationalize that the potential problem areas will go away or improve once marriage or commitment to the relationship occurs. However, this rarely happens. What is critical to any healthy relationship is the ability to identify each others' needs and trust enough to be able to articulate them to the other person. Coupled with this is the ability to listen to the needs of the other person and negotiate a mutually agreed upon resolution. If this does not happen, then chances are those "red flags" that are ignored or minimized will likely be magnified and worse, leading to the statement, "If I knew then what I know now, I would not have gotten into this situation."

Far too often, couples engage in power struggles, each holding the other responsible for needs not being met. With each entrenched in their own positions and tenaciously believing one is right and the other is wrong, they end up unhappily in a no win position. Far too often, if one has a particular position or viewpoint, it is automatically thought that the other person should also have the same thought or viewpoint. It is extremely difficult to understand that their partner may have a different view of a particular situation that is different yet equally valid as their own.

Case example #19

Paul complained that his wife, Sharon, was not making his lunch in the morning before he went off to work. His contention was that he was the sole breadwinner and she stayed home all day with the kids. Paul, on a deeper level, felt unappreciated. Whenever he tried to talk to Sharon about wanting her to do more around the house for him, it would end up with his yelling and her shutting down.

In order for this relationship to work, Paul needed to put aside his unrealistic expectations of his wife and talk to and not talk at her. Paul slowly was able to do this. He began to talk about not shares much of the same feelings. She too felt unappreciated in the

relationship. Paul, being focused only on his own needs, did not realize all the work Sharon did around the house and for him. He instead took what she did for granted. With their trusting and opening up more, they discovered that hade unmet needs that they did not share with one another. When they were able to focus on the underlying unmet needs that each of them had and were able to negotiate getting those needs met, the issues of who did what and when, no longer became an issue. Letting go of irrational ideas Paul had about Sharon, opened the door to a closer, more realistic relationship.

In order to further assist in the process of self growth, the reader is asked to reflect on the following statements. In so doing, the reader is made aware of areas personally and within the relationship that can benefit from improvement, thus paving the way to positive change.

1.) Do you get frustrated when your partner fails to understand what your needs are?

2.) If your partner doesn't fulfill your needs, are you lost?

3.) Instead of waiting for your partner to fulfill your needs, what can you take personal responsibility for changing?

4.) Do you view yourself as being in a codependent relationship and if so, what do you think you can do about it?

5.) What unexpressed needs do you have that you have not directly expressed to your partner?

6.) What, if any "irrational ideas" expectations do you have of yourself and your partner?

In keeping with the commitment to taking small steps toward taking charge of your life, kindly circle the following statements Agree, Disagree or Uncertain (A, D, U).

1.) I believe my partner mostly needs to make the necessary changes. A D U

2.) If my partner does not change, I take responsibility for making changes myself. A D U

3.) I think I am asked to do too much of the changing. A D U

4.) I am clear with my partner as to what my needs from him/her are. A D U

5.) My partner is clear with me as to what his/her needs are. A D U

6.) I am more apt to judge my partner's views as being either right or wrong as opposed to being different. A D U

7.) I am fearful that if I change, my partner won't. A D U

In going through these statements, closely examine and reflect more deeply on each one. Any statement that brings forth the answer of "Uncertain" may need further exploration that would shed light on reasons for the uncertainly and what needs to be done to make the answers specifically a "Agree" or "Disagree" In thinking about the reasons for particular answers for each, attempt to continue to come up with possible improvement strategies.

Part III
Moving toward a more positive interdependency between personal growth and satisfying relationships

7

"It's the reaction of the host, not the strength of the pathogen."
Edwin Friedman, rabbi and marriage counselor

A. *Examining how enhancing one's sense of self can enhance one's relationship with others*

People constantly struggle with changing the self defeating ways they think about themselves. They want to feel better about themselves, yet continue telling themselves that they are not good enough, not smart enough, falling short of other people. So why do they feel such ways about themselves when they sincerely want to view themselves differently? The answer in part is related to the natural resistance to change that was discussed earlier in this book. Change, though part of every moment of life, is stressful in and of itself. Even the positive change of enhancing one's self image is resisted on an unconscious level because it often contradicts what many people are programmed to think about themselves. Though they may not feel comfortable with the way they view themselves, it is something they are use to and have learned to tolerate the often intolerable. Changing the way one thinks about oneself also means changing behavior and for many that upsets their status quo. Through repetition of certain thoughts and behaviors, their mind has become accustomed to thinking certain ways about themselves and behaving in ways that reinforce their thought process.

No matter what the behavioral problem may be, people want to feel better about themselves and experience an enhanced quality of life. However, against this backdrop, there is the constant unconscious striving to resist the initial stress experienced when new concepts are introduced. People want to feel better but the pull toward repeated cognitive distortions becomes difficult to resist. However, for any change to take place, people need to realize that there is an initial stressful period attempting any new behavior. In order to minimize the level of stress, people need to proceed in small steps and not be discouraged by setbacks. Many people give up quickly and revert to the old familiar ways of thinking and behaving. In order to derive the benefits of thinking and behaving in ways that enhance self esteem, people need to persevere through initially feeling uncomfortable. Success will be eventually realized when people take steps that are small enough to stretch a little but not that big of a step that it results in distress. This tactic consistently pursued will strengthen the likelihood that the person will be successful in developing a more positive self concept.

Does this mean that people on a deeper level, do not want to feel better about themselves or want an improved quality of life? On the contrary, people are beings in process, striving to enhance the quality of their lives. Most want to feel better about themselves and to be surrounded by positive relationships that nurture and sustain them. However, many people keep repeating those old, patterns that no longer give them the results they want. Instead they more

often than not continue to reinforce a learned life style that not longer serves them well. As a result, many people go through life existing rather than truly living. They go through the mundane day in and day out. This carries over into relationships. The type of partner chosen can reinforce their sense of self.

As previously discussed, change generally is a complex phenomenon. This is no less the case when attempting to changing to enhance one's sense of self. It does not automatically happen in a simple cause and effect manner. Old ingrained habits of thinking about oneself can usually get in the way. There appears to be an internal emotional tug of war. On one hand, there is a demand for the immediate results from the attempts to behave in ways that enhance the self esteem. On the other hand, there is the knowledge that long lasting change from different thinking and behaving takes time. For many, changing how people think about themselves is a new concept. Anything that is new is foreign to people's core character and consequently is uncomfortable and is resisted. However, breaking through that core resistance is critical to enhancing one's sense of self.

Many people tenaciously hold onto old, outmoded perceptions and ways of living regardless that they fall short in achieving their life goal. It's not because of laziness or insincere resolutions. Its roots lie in the recesses of our early childhood. During these formative years, they are the recipients of a barrage of messages from parents and other adult figures. This affects their personal perceptions about themselves and the world around them. It matters little if the messages are accurate or even close to being accurate. What matters are the beliefs in their accuracy. Even if they as children silently question the accuracy of the information about themselves and the world around them, it is difficult not to internalize. As children, they can put a particular spin on it in order to make it work and not disappoint their parents. This lessens their going through the stress of upsetting their emotional equilibrium (Plomin & McClearn, 1992).

In order to change this self defeating process, people need to begin to understand that change and ambivalence go hand in hand with the process of enhancing a healthier sense of self. To begin this process of developing a more positive and authentic sense of self, it may do well to reflect on the following involving change:

Five Realities of the Change Process
- *Change is generally resisted by persons and groups*
- *Change is generally feared by persons and groups*
- *Lasting change only occurs within the context of change.*
- *Real change occurs from within outward.*
- *Change, to be real and lasting, must be slow and gradual.*
  - *George Eastman (c.1987)*

1. ***Change is generally resisted by persons and groups.***

    As was stated earlier, people are creatures of habit. Therefore, asking someone to change the way they think about themselves is asking them to go from the known to the unknown. Even with the inherent benefits of having a more positive self image, the fear of the unknown results is great.

Changing to a more enhanced self image is also resisted by partners and significant others. Though one's partner would want the best for you, changing also threatened their status quo. Change, even positive change, produces stress which is resisted by others as well. In addition, there is pressure from others to fulfill their expectations, which may be different from yours.

2. *Change is generally feared by persons or groups.*

This is because anything that is unknown and different from the norm is uncomfortable and on some level feared. Going into the uncharted waters of changing how you view yourself can bring unpredictable results. There is no one that does not want to feel good about themselves. Yet being creatures of habit, people naturally gravitate to what is known rather than to the unknown results generated by even an enhanced sense of self. This goes for individuals and for those close to them.

3. *Lasting change only occurs in the context of change*

Choosing to develop an enhanced sense of self does not automatically happen with a change of feeling or thought. In actuality, the road to self improvement may not begin with any change in feeling or thought about oneself. There is a saying in Alcoholic Anonymous that says "You have to fake it, before you make it". This means that even if you do not initially think or feel you have achieved an enhanced sense of self, it is important to act as if you do. The brain acts as a computer. What is fed in, it feds out. Therefore by engaging in positive self talk and behaving in ways that convey an enhanced sense of self, the brain will gradually integrate this new data. With positive results will come positive beliefs and feelings about oneself.

4. *Real change occurs from within outward.*

In order to enhance one's self esteem one must begin to be aware of cognitive distortion or negative self talk that consistently reinforces a negative self image by messages that are fed into it. These automatic negative messages will need to be challenges by introducing more positive messages. It matter little if these positive messages are believed or not. What matters is that the positive messages constantly be repeated. Through the repetition of positive self talk and change of behavior will slowly come forth the enhanced self image sought after.

5. *Change, to be real and lasting, must be slow and gradual.*

Changing one's sense of self that is enhanced and positive is not accomplished in one fell swoop. Remember that the development of a negative sense of self was through a slow process over many years. To be lasting, changes in self esteem need to take place in small increments. People often fail when attempting too much all at once. When attempting to enhance self esteem becomes too drastic, the equilibrium will become upset and will

naturally resist the change. Relapse can result and the former negative tapes in one's head become stronger than before. The changes in self esteem need to be in small increments that are small enough not to be threatening and just large enough to provide a little stretch beyond one's comfort zone.

Prochoska, Norcross and Diclemente (1994) talk about the importance of baby steps in moving the person from the early stages of awareness to applying what is learned into action. They point out that change is resisted due to a reluctance to think outside one's comfort zone. Therefore, moving slowly toward a clearly defined goal is viewed as greatly enhancing the chances of achieving a desired outcome.

1. The relationship between how one's thoughts affects one's behavior with others:

> *"Change your thoughts and you change your world"*
> *Norman Vincent Peale*

There is a story of a Navajo grandfather who once told his grandson, "Two wolves live inside me. One is the bad wolf, full of greed and laziness, full of anger and jealousy and regret. The other is the good wolf, full of joy and compassion and willingness and great love for the world. All the time, these wolves are fighting inside me." "But grandfather," the boy said, "Which wolf will win?" The grandfather answered, "The one I feed."

Inherently, beliefs create emotions, which influence actions. These actions can influence one's outlook on life in positive and negative ways. The intensity of such actions will result in affecting one's life in proportionate to the depth of the belief and the intensity of the feelings about those beliefs. Therefore, changing negative beliefs and self-talk to positive beliefs and self-talk can enhance the person's self esteem and circumstances in life. Consistent positive affirmation such as "I deserve good things in life" replacing "I'll never amount to anything." can result in dynamic enhancement in one's sense of self (Thompson, 2003).

A while back there was a news report about a tornado that had hit a community in the Midwest. It was reported that a number of homes had been destroyed as a result. The news media interviewed a number of its victims. One woman who was interviewed had been extremely upset and visibly distraught. She reported that her house had been destroyed, she and her family were now homeless and she didn't know what they were going to do. They then interviewed a second victim who appeared relatively calm in her demeanor. She too had her house destroyed and she and her family were left homeless. However, she went on to state she was grateful that everyone in her family got out alive and that even the family dog was safe. She believed she and her family were fortunate and that they would be able to start over.

 Two women went through the same experience, yet each viewed it differently. Why? It appeared that the different ways each of these women responded to the same incident was not dictated by their homes being destroyed but rather by their thought about the destruction. One viewed it as a crisis with no hope and the other wanted and was willing to move forward after such devastation. This shows that it is not life circumstances that define who you are but rather how you view and deal with them.

The concept of how people's thoughts and self talk affect the way they deal with circumstances in life also applies when dealing with people who are different. During the course of the day, people are constantly bombarded by thoughts about themselves and the people around them. The focus of these thoughts governs how people relate to people close to them. If people's thoughts are full of negativity and alert to signs of rejection, then they are more apt to miss positive opportunities that present themselves in their relationships. Perception is a key concept here. Try this experiment. Look at the following domain name *www.opportunityisnowhere.com.* To some, this web site seems discouraging, reading "*opportunity is no where."* But others see the exact opposite. They read, *"opportunity is now here."* Remember what is put into the brain, affects perceptions.

People who consistently think of themselves as worthy of good things, tend to attract partners who are of like mind and who are open to mutually addressing their needs. Those who consistently feed their minds with negative thoughts, fearing rejection or possible loss, will consciously or unconsciously attract themselves to partners that will ultimately reinforce this concept.

Albert Ellis's (2005) basic theory postulates that one's behavior and affect follow from thinking. His theory consists of an (A) leading to a (B) the thoughts about (B) leading to (C), the response. As an example, (A) is the antecedent or something has occurred such as when partner #1 in a relationship is being quiet. This can lead to (B) or partner #2 thinking and in turn believing that partner #1's quietness means that partner #1 doesn't love partner#2. This can result in (C) which was the consequences of the thoughts or the action took such as the expression of anger or rage. Partner #1 may merely be deep in thought, but no matter. Partner #2's behavior was based on thought and misinterpretation on the expression of quietness. As in this example, far too often behavior is based on the interpretation of an occurrence rather than the occurrence itself.

McKay, Davis & Fanning (2003) theorize eight patterns of limited thinking that adversely affect how couples relate to one another. They include the following.

1. *Filtering:* This pattern is characterized by type of tunnel vision. It is characterized by people filtering into their consciousness the elements that reinforce their own pre-conceived ideas about a situation to the exclusion of everything else. For example;
   ➢ The depressed person who is hypersensitive to perceived indifference or lack of caring and is blind or unaffected by overt signs of genuine affection.
   ➢ The anxious person whose possible of a loss of face and potential embarrassment overshadows an overture by a partner that might be welcoming and safe.
   ➢ The chronically angry person who is conscious only of perceived injustices portrayed by the partner and screens out fairness and attempts at understanding.

2. _**Polarized thinking:**_ This is dualistic thinking or seeing the world in terms of only black and white with no shades of gray. People who engage in polarized thinking interpret others in extremes, either placing the other person unduly on a pedestal to perceiving the other person with malevolent intent. Not only does this type of thinking impact the nature of relationships, it also impacts how the people in those relationships judge themselves. A simple mistake can result in a harsh judgment of oneself regardless of attempts at reassurances by one's partner.

3. _**Overgeneralization:**_ In this thought pattern, people make general conclusions based on a single incident or piece of evidence. This is typical with people who have had an unhealthy experience in their past, expect the experience to repeat itself in the present. As a result, these people, when in a relationship with a loved one, a small conflict can become generalized into a global judgment. They ignore all evidence to the contrary, ever vigilant to signs that will verify their view of how relationships turn out.

4. _**Mind Reading:**_ In this pattern, people make snap judgments about their partner. They assume they know how others are feeling and what motivates them. Mind reading depends on a process called projection. This is when one partner imagines that the other person in the relationship feels the same way or reacts in the same way that they would. The thought of being different is not part of their thought process. If one partner gets angry at the other partner is late, then the thought is that everyone would feel that way. If a partner feels rejected, the expectation is that most people feel the same.

5. _**Catastrophic thinking:**_ With this type of thinking a small thing becomes a big thing. The probable becomes mixed up with the possible. This person is always waiting for the "shoe to drop" in the relationship. If things are going well in the relationship and one small real or imagined set back occurs, then the relationship is doomed. This person doesn't feel in control of his or her world. Therefore, being vigilant is perceived by the person as being prepared for something possibly going wrong.

6. _**Magnifying:**_ This pattern occurs when people think that small mistakes are tragic failures. In relationships minor suggestions become scathing criticism. Slight obstacles become overwhelming barriers. People who magnify the difficulties in life tend to minimize their ability to deal with such things effectively. This sort of thinking can circumvent couples from openly discussing issues fearing one partner would not be able to handle it.

7. _**Personalizing:**_ This type of thinking can adversely affect the nature of a relationship when people in it relate everything to themselves. An example of this is when a depressed wife blames herself when she sees any sadness in her husband. A husband thinks that every time his wife complains of being tired, she means she's tired of him. The husband whose wife complains of rising prices hears the complaints as attacks on his ability as a breadwinner. The list can go on and on. Adults who felt constantly criticized as children tend to internalize these messages and repeat them in their current relationships. 81

8. ***Rigid thinking:*** In this pattern of thinking, people have lists of inflexible standards by which they and their partners should behave. The standards are perceived as right and any deviation from them is viewed as wrong. As a result, these people often judge and find fault in their partners. The thought that their partners may have different standards does not enter their minds. They often detect in their partners unacceptable traits, habits and opinions which become extremely irritating. To them, their partners should know what is expected without even being asked. An example would be a wife who felt her husband ought to want to take her out on weekends and make plans accordingly. If he does not do this then he cares more about himself than about her. People with this type of rigid thinking are as hard on themselves as they are on their mate. They are compelled to be or act a certain way.

Regardless of the particular irrational thinking style, the end results are the same. The people taking on these patterns end drifting further away from what they ultimately want in a relationship which is an enhanced sense of self and an improved quality of life.

2. Making changes with oneself implicitly changes the nature of the   relationship;

<u>*Case example #21*</u>

Mary reported that the emotional struggle she was experiencing felt within herself and within her relationship, felt as if she was walking in the woods with a backpack full of rocks. The rocks were both past and present emotional wounds. She went on to state that the backpack was extremely heavy and she was unable to rest or take the backpack off.

Discussing the matter further Mary said that the stones in her "backpack" came from three sources. The first were from old unresolved emotional hurts and wounds from her past. The second source was from those people very close to her, like her husband, Walt, who would be along the wooded path placing stones in her backpack, which included disregarding her thoughts and feelings and being emotionally unavailable to her. The third source of the stones was she herself, in regards to her thoughts and feelings in the here and now. Her response to all three was either by a hostile over reaction or by a deep depression.

Mary's only solution was viewed by how Walt treated her. As a result, she had a tremendous emotional dependency on him. Mary's expectations of Walt were unrealistic in that he was emotionally ill equipped to be what she wanted him to be. As long as she was fixated on her happiness contingent on her husband, she would result in unhappiness and resentment. Walt, on the other hand, blamed Mary for what he claimed was her attempts at controlling him. The more she pursued him with her demands, the more he emotionally withdrew.

Mary began to realize that in order to begin to empty her "backpack" she needed to focus first on herself and her own dysfunctional way of thinking and behaving. Looking to Walt as her savior, gave him unusual power over her and was unrealistic. Slowly as she became less

dependent on Walt, she became more self reliant. She began to develop a social life of her own, connecting with a network of friends. She became more involved in the finances of the house. She became more proactive in getting her needs appropriately met without depending on Walt.

There were certain needs she was willing to negotiate getting met within her relationship with Walt. However, her need for emotional intimacy was crucial to any relationship she was in. Therefore, unless Walt could be more emotionally present to her, she was going to leave. This would not be an easy choice in that she still loved Walt very much. For now she decided to stay with him as opposed to impulsively leaving or staying because of a dysfunctional need. As Mary began to become more independent, Walt needed a adjust to the changes she made. The couple began to communicate more and Walt began to realize that what he interpreted as Mary controlling him was really his fear of closeness. He got into individual counseling to work on his own unresolved issues. As a couple they both began to work on their own issues in and out of counseling bringing them closer together.

Like Mary, anyone wanting to enhance their relationship, need to take personal responsibility for changing things about themselves that affect them and the relationship they are in. For example, if one person in the relationship becomes depressed, the question to be addressed is how will that depression affect the couple's communication and overall relationship? Whatever the issue, be it anger, anxiety, weight gain, unemployment, self-punishment, intimacy fears, or depression, each individual's behavior affects the relationship. This has a multitude of ramifications to the relationship. (Weeks and Treat, 2001)

Regardless of the possible outcome, the ability to change personal attributes that negatively impact personal growth and thus the relationship need to be addressed. Though there is no guarantee as to the reaction of one partner to the change in the other, the continuation of the status quo is ultimately not beneficial to either party. Each person in the relationship needs to take personal responsibility for changing themselves. He or she need not wait for the insight or growth of the other person before movement toward a healthier interaction can take place.

3. Unresolved past issues get played out in current relationships;

History has a habit of repeating itself. Individuals within families can repeat dysfunctional patterns learned from childhood. These patterns are passed on from grandparents to parents, from parents to children and so on and so forth.

Earnest Johnson (1990) reports that verbal and sexual abuse have a greater impact on children's perceptions of themselves and the environment in which they are raised. He cites this is more so than children who are raised in an environment where they experience physical abuse. Those children who suffer verbal and sexual abuse tend to be angry as adults and more pessimistic about future relationships. However, they are less likely to believe that the abuse they suffered as children was their fault. This is the opposite for children who suffered physical abuse in growing up. They tended to be more accepting of the blame for being mistreated. This naturally affected how they viewed themselves and what type of choices they made as adults, especially in their selections of mates.

Johnson goes on to illustrate a kind of domino effect whereby a child experiencing parental abuse exhibits a poorer self- image as an adult, which in turn adversely affects the choice in partner, which in turn adversely affects how conflict is handled, which affects marital satisfaction and ultimately one's physical health. Johnson cites that the greater autonomic arousal in interacting married couples was a strong predictor of a subsequent decline in marital satisfaction. There also was an increase in marital stress with a corresponding decrease in physical health. The possibility was raised that the persistent physiological arousal associated with disturbed and problematic relationships could lead to alterations in endocrine and immune functioning that might in turn lead to decreased physical health. Suppressed hostility for example that is learned from childhood may have long lasting affects on adult mortality.

Life is not a simple cause and effect. What doesn't get resolved today gets played out in some way tomorrow. Life has a way of repeating itself in many diverse and strange ways. Therefore, it behooves people to take personal charge of their emotional, psychological, spiritual and physical health. Leaving this to someone else is not always in people's best interest. Changing dysfunctional ways of thinking and behaving not only reaps personal benefits but also circumvents those dysfunctional patterns from being repeated by their children.

4. Balancing personal growth with a successful relationship;

It is practical, doable and necessary for healthy personal development and successful relationships to go hand in hand. Working on oneself through the relationship and working on the relationship through developing oneself can lead to balanced personal growth along with succeeding with relationships (Weeks and Treat, 2002). Insight, cognitive restructuring (changing the way one thinks) and behavioral changes are all necessary to break the power of repetition of early childhood pain that gets played out later in life and in relationships (Beck & Emery,1985).

As part of personal growth, people need to develop a greater insight and understanding of family-of-origin issues. How did the past affect present choices that may or may not be useful yet are still repeated? The constant yearly repetition of the same thoughts and feelings are so automatic, that they are now unrecognizable. With this insight comes awareness of patterns that can be identified and labeled. Examples of new awareness of often unconscious mental thoughts include self- criticism, rejection, fear of abandonment and incompetence. People raised in an atmosphere where they are made to feel not good enough, not smart enough, not good looking enough, tend to internalize such messages and as stated previously. They tend to automatically give themselves these messages well into adulthood (Johnson, 1993). These get translated into negative self- talk such as, "I can't do anything right," "Bad luck always follows me," and "I'll never find someone who will truly love me."

Thoughts that start out referring only to oneself, usually end up being referred to the partner as well. For example, when people start thinking, "I am a loser," it in turn creates insecurities and self-doubt. This in turn, gets played out in the relationship by becoming, "My partner thinks I am a loser," which creates withdrawal and/or victimization. This illustrates how people's self- esteem can effect how they view themselves within the relationships. Inversely, it also illustrates how people view themselves within the relationships can effect their self- esteem.

What these people fail to realize is that though as children they were victimized by parents and/or significant others, as adults this no longer need be the case. As adults, people can begin taking charge of creating their own emotional journeys. As they begin to view themselves as creators of their own destinies, they recognize that the feelings of rejection are in a large part created from their past and their reactions to what they view going on in their present (Thompson, 2003).

However, when people begin to move from viewing themselves as being victimized by others to being in charge of their own destinies, they can move toward a cognitive restructuring. Viewing themselves differently makes room for thinking about themselves differently. This moves them from negative, outmoded self- talk to more realistic, pragmatic self- talk. This does not mean their world will be a utopia but it will build the confidence that they can meet the challenges of life. If done often and consistently enough, whether truly believed or not, the mind will start internalizing the messages and affect self- perception and interpersonal relationships in more healthy and appropriate ways (Beck & Emery, 1985).

As a result of reframing and reinterpreting how one looks at a given situation, interpersonal conflict can take on new meaning. People making a paradigm shift of looking at the same situation from a different perspective can result in different behavior leading to different results. What once led a partner to feel wounded, rejected or criticized can now contain other possibilities for interpretation and response. As a result, a spouse coming home from work late may not be a sign of rejection but may simply be miscommunication or an indication that he or she is working hard and is just tired. Here there clearly is a movement from a single, one dimensional negative interpretation of one's partner's behavior to rather being open to a number of different possible explanations. As a result, there is movement toward being in charge of oneself, instead of allowing others being in charge.

Combining new insight, along with new ways of thinking and behaving, people can be successful in breaking repetitive, self- defeating patterns that adversely affect how they view themselves and consequently the relationships they are in. Instead of feeling rejected and then withdrawing, people can learn to reach out. In place of feeling invisible, people can express their needs while still respecting the needs of others. There is more of an open expression of feelings rather than an aggressive reaction, in order to hide a fear of rejection. Now, "I was concerned about you," replaces, "Why aren't you home on time?" (Weeks and Treat, 2002).

5. *Food for thought;*

Summary

Many people profess to want to enhance their sense of self in order to feel better and experience an improved life for themselves. However, typically their search for enhancement of self is tied into how others relate to them. If they are not loved by others, then they don't feel loveable. Their sense of self is tied into how others view them rather than how they view themselves.

Though dysfunctional behavior does little to enhance their self esteem, the road to change I viewed as daunting. Therefore, people tolerate the intolerable because to them even developing an enhanced sense of self results in too much stress. Movement into the unknown is foreign and out of their comfort zone. Though people generally want a better quality of life, the initial discomfort makes changing too threatening. Nelson Mandela eloquently addressed this issue in his 1994 inaugural speech. The following is an excerpt of that speech.

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, "Who am I to be brilliant?" You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

Statements about…..

The choices people make on how they view themselves and the relationships they are in are to no small extent affected by influence past and present. In reading the following statements, reflect on how much your self esteem affects your relationship and how your relationship affects your self esteem. Taking charge of yourself rather giving that responsibility to others gives you the greatest chance of developing the most appropriate and authentic sense of self. In keeping with the commitment of taking small steps toward enhancing your self esteem, kindly circle the following statements Agree, Disagree or Uncertain (A, D, U).

1.) I think I fall short of my partner's expectations. A D U

2.) In our relationship, we rarely talk about personal issues that concern me. A D U

3.) My partner and I seem to have different wants and needs. A D U

4.) I consider myself abused by my partner. A D U

5.) Like my parent(s), my partner often finds fault with what I say and do. A D U

6.) I fall short of my expectations of myself visa vie my relationship. A D U

7. In my relationship, I am recognized for what I do as opposed to who I am. A D U

8.) I find that I engage in negative self talk about myself. A D U

9.) My view of myself reflects how I relate to my partner. A D U

10.) How partner acts toward me, reflects on how I view myself. A D U

11.) I notice I exhibit patterns in my relationship similar to my parents. A D U

12. My behavior reinforces how I view myself. A D U

In going through these statements, closely examine and reflect more deeply on each one. Any statement that brings forth the answer of "Uncertain" may need further exploration that would shed light on reasons for the uncertainty and what needs to be done to make the answers specifically a "Agree" or "Disagree" depending on each of the statements.

If you recognize a repeated pattern from your upbringing or in your present relationship, know that you can now take charge of your life and enhance how you view yourself. One of the good things about the past and present relationships is that they can be used as learning experiences. They need not be used as reasons to continue with thoughts and behavior that no longer enhance how you view yourself. Changing patterns of thought and behavior is a process and if made in small increments consistently can bring forth an enhanced self esteem. In thinking about the reasons for particular answers for each of the above statements, attempt to continue to come up with possible improvement strategies that will move you toward a more appropriate sense of self.

As stated previously, taking charge of yourself does not occur in one fell swoop. Very often, it begins with successes and setbacks. Being discouraged can be a nemesis. However, perseverance in spite of initial set backs is critical. In line with this thinking, the following will illustrate the need to persevere and focus on the ultimate goal you are planning to achieve.

Tony Robbins, the noted motivational speaker, tells a story about perseverance on his motivational lecture CD's. It refers to Colonel Sanders from Kentucky Fried Chicken fame. Prior to his fame, he managed a take out stand selling fried chicken. However, when a major highway came through, his stand was demolished. At that point, he was over 65 years of age and was in receipt of a meager social security check. He also had a secret chicken recipe that he thought he could market in local restaurants. So he set out to surrounding restaurants attempting to get the owners to utilize his chicken recipe as part of their menus when preparing their chicken dinners. One by one, he was turned downed as he went to various restaurants. How many restaurants do you think he went to before he reached an enthusiastic buyer and thus making history? The answer was not 5 or 10 or even 25 restaurants. The answer is 1005 restaurants. Colonel Sanders certainly had insight into the merits of his product and his thoughts and behavior were certainly positive in nature. However, in order to achieve his success, he needed perseverance. Remember this story when the positive changes you want to make within yourself appears elusive.

8

"Every step is a victory."

Lao Tzu

A. *Examining the relationship and its impact on personal development:*

As discussed, relationships have a way of effecting our personal development, with healthy or unhealthy results. It is common for people in couples counseling to be a little perplexed when asked if in any way do they view themselves as part of the problem. They typically view their partner as having the problem rather then themselves. If they see themselves as having a problem at all, it would be that they put up with their partner's inappropriate behavior. It is also not unusual for them to question any change that they may need to make themselves. To them, not only does the problem lie with the other person, it also gets the other person off the hook.

People who expect other persons in relationships to change when they may not want to is being unrealistic in their expectations. If a crisis occurs in the relationship, one party brings the other in for counseling under a threat of some kind. The reason usually involves invoking change in the other person. Once the crisis has subsided, the motivation for change usually wanes. If the end of the crisis brings the couple to a previous state of equilibrium that was functional, then dealing only with the presenting problem may be an appropriate and healthy decision. The couple can then always come back and deal with other issues as they present themselves. Typically these couples claim to want change in their relationship but in reality want their pain to go away and for their partners to change.

People often fail to realize is that true change in relationships begins with personal change. However, change in one person can also affect change in the other person as well. This occurs because the other person now has to adjust to the changes in behavior of the partner. However, as already stated, there is a natural tendency to resist change even if it is positive. Therefore, of one partner changes, there is no way of predicting how the other partner will adjust to those changes. With the unpredictability of how one's partner will respond to the changes made, there is a natural propensity to maintain the status quo rather than risk an uncertain response. However, taking this route will only ensure repeating the same dysfunctional pattern and squelch any opportunity for positive differences to occur (James and Wilson, 1986).

In this chapter, we will look at how positive personal change can take place within the confines of a relationship and how it can be instrumental in bringing couples to a higher level of intimacy.

1. Areas of relational conflict providing opportunities for self- examination;

Luepnitz (2002) paraphrases Schopenhauer's well known fable about porcupines to illustrate that love everywhere is a thorny affair, where almost every intimate relationship also contains sediments of hostility, with each person struggling to find balance between the two. The fable is paraphrased as follows:

> *A troop of porcupines is milling about on a cold winter's day. In order to keep from freezing, the animals move closer together. Just as they are close enough to huddle, however, they start to poke each other with their quills. In order to stop the pain, they spread out, lose the advantage of the warmth, and again begin to shiver. This sends them back in search of each other, and the cycle repeats as they struggle to find a comfortable distance between entanglement and freezing.*

In order to achieve a workable balance between the two extremes, relational conflict can occur. This conflict can provide excellent opportunities for personal growth. As strange as it may seem, when one person in the relationship is able to "push the button" of the other person in the relationship, it can provide opportunities to deal with personal issues that have gone unrecognized or avoided. Cahn (1994) reports a great deal of marital dissatisfaction and marital conflict center around issues not related to the here and now but rather from unresolved feelings of the past. However, passing up the opportunity to examine such issues in a larger scope, can lead to emotional distancing and mutual blame. Until the individual's underlying feelings are adequately addressed, interpersonal conflict with the couple will repeat itself going unresolved. Cahn goes on to recommend a greater awareness among couples of the possible underlying causes of repetitive problems that surface. He then recommends taking appropriate steps toward implementing more productive coping strategies. By only looking at surface rsponses, couples may miss cues of what's really going on under the surface. This results in missed opportunities for personal and relational change.

Vangelisti, Reis and Fitzpatrick have examined how various researchers view the nature of relationships and how conflict can provide opportunities for mutual growth or mutual destruction. Arguments, for example, can be positive when resolution of the issue at hand takes place and there is a sense of closure. When this does not happen, couples engage in serial arguments. This means that couples argue about the same type of issue over and over with no resolution.

Issues for couples revolving around power and intimacy are viewed as areas of greatest importance in that the resolution is heavily influenced by each of the parties involved. Because a healthy resolution is dependent on both people in the relationship working together, it can be a source of potential conflict. Indeed, disagreements about power and intimacy were the most frequent and damaging conflict across all types of relationships (Vangelisti, Reis and Fitzpatrick, 2002).

Arguments begin because one person challenges another's behavior and the person targeted can become highly defensive. This implies that there are two roles within what can end up being a serial argument. One role is that of the initiator, who desires that his or her partner change, and the resistor, who does not wish to change. Indeed, all accounts of serial arguments

indicate that one partner plays the role of initiator who demands change, while the other is the resistor who withdraws or becomes defensive.

However, people's role in serial arguments may not be static. For example, the partners that are complained about (the resistors), may conclude that their behavior is not problematic. Instead they may view the partners who do the complaining (the initiators) as exhibiting much more problematic behavior. As a result, the resistors may respond with, "What about you?" when initiators bring up their perceived flaws. Consequently, resistors may not only be taking on defensive modes but also may attempt to initiate arguments aimed at changing behavior of the complaining partners. However, this strategy is rarely successful. This is because one issue at a time needs to be dealt with and resolved fairly quickly. Once accomplished, couples can more easily go on to resolving the next issue. Otherwise various forms of serial arguments will ensue.

Couples who aggressively confront one another when in conflict or passively avoid dealing with conflicting issues often fail when attempting to find or maintain intimacy. The partner who views conflict as a negative thing will react negatively when feeling attacked. Only when a couple can tolerate the initial discomfort of negotiating a possible resolution of their differences and not view it only in a negative way can true intimacy occur.

As stated earlier, different points of view need not be labeled as being right or wrong but may merely be another view of looking at the same reality. Being open to another view may indeed bring forth a closeness that may not otherwise have occurred. However, it is important for couples to stick with one issue at a time and not succumb to resurrecting other unresolved issues during that time. Remember, one issue at a time.

Also, attempting to understand the other person's point of view, while not necessarily agreeing with it, is a step in the right direction. Bringing differences to the surface in an open and honest fashion can provide opportunities for couples to clear the air and bring about mutually agreed upon resolutions. This can be done while still respecting each other's uniqueness.

Schwartz and Olds (2000) talk about how relationships between the sexes are undergoing perhaps the most far-reaching processes of change it has ever known. This is, in part, the result of a wide and complex array of information from social cmedia. It is also because of a reappraisal of the meaning of marriage and subsequent changes in expectations of it. Couples are electing not to marry as early or not to marry at all, but to rather co-habituate. Added to pressures created by the social, economic, and interpersonal factors, are the internal aspects of emotions affecting each person in the relationship. With the norms changing, opportunities are provided to challenge old beliefs and formulate new ways of looking at relationships.

2. Current relationships provide opportunities to heal past wounds;

When couples find themselves in dysfunctional relationships, it is far too easy to blame the other person and view exiting the relationship as the only feasible option. Though

terminating a relationship may at times be the healthiest of choices, a relationship can also be a vehicle for personal growth and development. This can best occur when both in the relationship strive to strengthen the bond between them. It can even occur when one is committed to this goal and the other is not.

Hendrix (2008) views couples in a relationship as the core forum from which each person can effectively deal with personal conflict and struggles. He goes on to state that these conflicts and struggles, that manifest themselves in the context of present relationships that have their origin from their past. Couples, by the very nature of their relationship, can be helped in working through earlier unresolved personal issues. Through the relationship, they can rediscover the lost parts of themselves and develop their full potential.

This can happen through a process of openness toward the other person, viewing that person as a potential source of personal growth. This does not happen overnight but rather in small increments. The focus is rather on what can be learned from the other person rather than focusing with resentment on the other person's perceived shortcomings. Focusing only on the negative will only reinforce more negativity. Reinventing oneself in a positive light can only occur by creating new pathways in the brain that go counter to possible negativity programmed in the brain. With this in mind, it is critical to view the other person in the relationship as different and not necessarily wrong.

Being perceived as different, the other person in the relationship can bring forth a new perspective to one's world. Hendrix (2008) viewed couples being attracted to one another based upon unresolved issues from their past. He theorized that when couples get together, they are at various stages of working through their own unresolved issues. Regardless, of being at different stages, each can assist the other in the process of the personal growth. Ideally, couples can grow together. However if the differences are too great, it may be best for the couple to part. If this happens, the parting would not be perceived from a right/wrong position. They would rather be seen as two different people going down two different paths.

3. Relational change brings about personal change;

There is also a tendency, whether conscious or unconscious, to choose a partner that repeats a learned behavior based upon their past. This can stem either from those that existed between parents or those existed between parent and child. Some people complain that as a result, the perfect partner does not exist for them. They believe that in order to be able to go on to experience a healthy relationship, their potential partner would have to the perfect partner who has no prior issues. What they fail to realize is that most people come into relationships with a mixed bag. No one is perfect. It is rare to find persons coming into a relationship with no prior unresolved emotional wounds. This does not mean that these relationships are doomed. They can provide opportunities to work through those issues with another person in the here and now. This would counteract the sense of being alone with no safety net.

Case example #22

Shirley reported that she grew up in a divorced home. Her parents divorced when she was nine years of age. Prior to that time she was quite close to her father. However, after the divorce, her father married another woman and his relationship with Shirley grew distant. As the years progressed, Shirley grew more and more resentful toward her father, feeling that he had abandoned her. Her father eventually passed away, resulting in Shirley never going through the process of attempting to reconcile with him.

In addition, Shirley was never able to sustain a relationship with a man that was satisfying and fulfilling. In every relationship, she would end up with a man who misused her trust and abandoned her. She reached a point where she questioned whether or not she would ever meet the right man. Shirley rationalized this by complaining that "a good man was hard to find." However, she knew she did not want to grow old alone and wan to share her life with someone. Slowly she began to risk trusting that that there may be a different experience for her.

She eventually started dating a man named Louis who she had met at a dance. Dancing was something she loved to do but something she had gotten away from. She initially feared meeting someone there who would eventually hurt her. Louis, though far from perfect, accepted her as she was, validated her as a person and provided her with a sense of security This paved the way to her beginning to put trust in a man again Their relationship has blossomed and they have been able to maintain a long standing commitment to one another. Through her relationship with Louis, Shirley allowed herself to heal and to let go of the bitterness and resentment she had toward her father. She was able to view her father as a total person, with good and less than perfect qualities, who did the best he could, with what he had to work with.

4. Relational intimacy provides opportunities for personal growth;

If relationships are impaired, then in all likelihood individuals in them will become dysfunctional as well. Conversely, if relationships are open and honest, then there is a greater likelihood that the people in those relationships will be open to take charge of their personal growth by and taking the steps necessary to promote such growth.

For many, it is difficult to trust being oneself with one's partner. Bennett (2000) reports that intimacy is more about opening up to another on a much deeper level than in engaging in surface, everyday small talk. It is more about being open to another person It's about being open with one's uncertainties rather than being closed off. Intimacy shifts the quality of the interaction, making the impersonal more personal, thereby closing the distance between two people. Intimacy allows for taking risks and trusting another human being. When revealing oneself to one's partner, there is a risk of making oneself vulnerable to being hurt by that person.

Relationships that are healthy and whole provide excellent opportunities for couples to mutually validate and respect one another. If people in a relationship can feel understood and accepted, then they each can more easily risk self- exposure regardless of perceived imperfections. Taking that risk would then be done without fear of rejection and abandonment.

When each in the relationship feel a sense of trust and validation from the other, there can begin to be more of an openness to one another. Taking the necessary small steps can begin the slow process of changing those behaviors that prevent optimal personal development and satisfying relationships. These positive changes can occur regardless of the engrained maladaptive behaviors learned from childhood. People begin to take charge of their own destinies rather than making persons, past or present, in charge of them. Relationships become more interdependent in nature. The results are more healthy relationships, where each person serves as a positive role model for the other, bringing out each other's best. Remember this does not happen overnight. As stated elsewhere in this text, it is a slow process that involves initially one step forward and two steps back. This is because change does not happen smoothly. It occurs with some initial setbacks which can be viewed as positive in that they allow for adjustment and realignment. Here patience and perseverance will surely win the race.

In addition, Weeks and Treats (2001) talk about the three "A" statements as they relate to relational intimacy. These include *affirmation, appreciation* and *affection*. By *affirmation*, Weeks and Treat mean making statements that affirm the value of the other person. Examples of this include conveying in words of being glad to be married to that person or glad to be with that person. Statements of *appreciation* deals with what the other person does. Here the person becomes aware and acknowledges when the other person does something positive and liked. This counters maximizing the negative while minimizing the positive. Verbalizing what is genuinely appreciated in a clear and specific way, without exaggerating it, makes a positive impact on the other person. It would also go a long way in reinforcing the behavior that is appreciated. The third "A" is *affection*. Here, Weeks and Treat (2001) refer to *affection* as showing signs of liking and loving the other person with words or actions. Touching, holding, kissing and making verbal statements of affection are viewed as important.

Further, in intimate relationships, each person takes responsibility for making the relationship work. One partner doesn't take all the blame while the other partner gives all the blame. Along with this is taking responsibility for one's feelings. This means not over reacting and venting impulsively at one's partner. It means being emotionally self- aware and being able to separate the feeling from a possible deeper unspoken need.

This does not mean uncomfortable feelings are not expressed. On the contrary, the ability to express deep underlying feelings without attacking the other person enhances intimacy and personal growth. Typically however, many couples mask their underlying feelings because they don't want to expose another to their emotional pain. So instead, they mask it through the expression of such emotions as anger. Anger is, more often than not, a defense against the deeper feelings of hurt. To be able to risk expressing those deeper feelings, without being judged and being misunderstood, can go a long way toward intimacy, self- acceptance and personal growth.

Intimate couples, in order to grow both together and individually, need to feel a sense of trust in each other. They need to trust that what goes on between them is not freely talked about with others without their full knowledge and consent. This includes with friends, family and acquaintances. This type of behavior counteracts the need to feel trust in one's partner. Couples

need to feel that the integrity of the relationship is protected by drawing clear boundaries around it. Couples need to feel safe enough to talk about issues with each other in an open and honest manner without concerns it will get out to others in the community. Exceptions to this would be those seeking outside professional counseling and certain community support groups.

Individuals in relationships grow when they feel genuinely cared for by the other person. It is an attitude of respect for each other stemming from an appropriate and healthy caring for oneself. Caring begins with awareness of each other needs. Each must be prepared and willing to meet those needs when appropriate and healthy for both.

Everyone wants to feel important. This is no less the case in relationships. If one feels genuinely valued and important by the other person in the relationship, then that certainly is fertile ground for personal growth and development. It means being viewed as a worthy person in the eyes to the other. It goes back to feeling validated, being heard, listened to and understood, without preconceived judgment. To be in this type of relationship, is to feel free to trust the other person to be oneself without any pretense and allowing the couple to take risks without repercussions.

5. *Food for Thought;*

Summary

People in impaired relationships typically blame their partner as the source of their emotional discomfort. This can happen when an emotional nerve is touched. This emotional nerve can also be a wake up call telling the person that some personal emotional healing needs to take place. The emotional discomfort can triggered by the unconscious mind bringing to the surface an underlying issue that needs to be worked on or healed.

Conversely, the relationship itself can also be a vehicle to heal the emotional pain or wounds unresolved from one's past. As reported in previous chapters, individuals rarely find the perfect partner. Each individual bring into a relationship their own previously unresolved issues. The goal therefore should not be to find the perfect partner but rather one who is open to growing together as equal partners and not one subservient to the other. This allows the relationship to mature and develop with confidence.

In continuing the growth process set forth in this book thus for, the reader is asked to consider the following questions. In reading the questions, give careful thought to the answers. The reader's answers hopefully will challenge long accepted misconceptions and bring about a greater understanding. This understanding can assist in moving toward taking personal charge of one's life. The questions are as follows.

1.) How much of your past affects your present relationship?
2.) Are you in a relationship because you want to be in it or that you have to be in it?
3.) How important to you to be listened to and truly understood by your partner?
4.) How much does the way you view yourself affect how you behave in your relationship?

Statements about…

      In any relationship, it is important to take a closer look at individual needs and wants and how they get expressed in the relationship. The results are choices people make in the partners they choose. In reading the following statements, reflect the needs, wants and values of the individuals in the relationship. Therefore, in keeping with the commitment to taking small steps toward taking charge of your life, kindly circle the following statements Agree, Disagree or Uncertain (A, D, U).

      Upon completion, the reader is then asked to proceed with careful reflection and thought. This hopeful will result in a paradigm shift, resulting in a change of attitude and behavior.

 1.) I state my needs clearly to my partner, confident that I will be heard. A D U

2.) I share my feelings openly with my partner, trusting that I will be understood. A D U

3.) When my partner brings to my attention a problem he/she is having with our
   relationship, I give him/her my full attention without pre-judging. A D U

4.) When I express myself to my partner, I don't feel that I am being heard. A D U

5.) When communicating with my partner, I feel respected, valued and understood. A D U

6.) I have a clear idea of what my partner wants in our relationship. A D U

    Again, if you recognize a repeated pattern from your upbringing, know that as an adult you can now take charge of your life. One of the good things about the past is that it can be used as a learning experience. It need not be used as a reason to continue with thoughts and behavior that no longer work. Change is a process and if made in small increments consistently can bring forth better things in life. Therefore, in thinking about the reasons for particular answers for each, attempt to continue to come up with possible improvement strategies.

      As previously stated throughout this book, insight alone will not make the necessary changes. It will also involve activities that that will result in positive personal and relational success. As a result, each chapter is not an end-all be-all but stepping stones in accomplishing the change the reader desires. Remember, change, to be lasting, must be done in small increments that move the reader to the overall goal of taking charge of one's life.

9

"Joy of companionship is not the outstretched hand, nor the kindly smile;
It is the spiritual inspiration that comes to you when you discover that someone else believes in
you and is willing to trust you."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

A. Examining steps at achieving interdependency between personal and interpersonal development:

In the business world, there is a saying that the worst choice for a disgruntled employee to make is not to quit and leave but rather to quit and stay. The same can be said of relationships. The worst thing that can happen with a couple in a dysfunctional relationship is not to end and leave the relationship but rather to quit the relationship and continue to stay in it. They chronically complain, yet are unwilling to change their part of the problem or leave.

As was previously stated, couples typically come into therapy focused on changing the irritating behaviors in the other person with whom they are in a relationship. The idea that they also need to examine their own contributing behavior is but a distant thought. Once they find out that both need to make the necessary changes in order for the relationship to work, their motivation becomes threatened. Rather than putting in the work to improve the relationship or appropriately ending it, they instead elect to drop out of treatment or stay in the relationship continuing the status quo. They're like the people who want to lose weight but resist appropriate eating habits and exercise.

To make a relationship work requires perseverance, dedication and the courage to take individual and collective responsibility for making the necessary changes one way or another. Taking the personal responsibility of being in charge of your life can affect the nature of the relationship. In turn, the nature of the relationship affects how the person views themselves.

1. Relational change affecting personal change;

"What comes first, the chicken or the egg?" This age old question can easily be substituted for: What comes first, relational change or personal change? Can the necessary personal change occur without healthy interaction between two people? Can the necessary relational change take place without the insight and motivation to change is made by each person? Transformation does not occur solely internally, within the human personality or solely outwardly within the relationship. Transformation ideally occurs with the interdependency of both, balancing with one another. When this occurs, contentious thinking softens, blurs and ultimately disappears. There is more of a harmony where each compliments and assists in actualizing the best in the other. When they are able to accomplish this, the effects on the relationships and on the human personality can be significant.

96

For better or worse, the state of a relationship at any given time affects how one feels about oneself. If a relationship is going well, then the couple feels contentment and ease. If a relationship is going badly, the opposite is true with individuals experiencing such feelings as anxiety and frustration. However, this should not blind people to the fact of taking personal charge of the choices they make around improving their lives and sense of self. The process can be enhanced through the nature of a positive, mutually satisfying relationship.

When two people are in a relationship, there is an interdependency between taking personal responsibility for choices and choices that are influenced by the dynamics of the relationship. To the extent the individual can trust the other person in the relationship, the interdependency between the two can be fertile ground for individual growth and relational enhancement. Just as personal growth and healing can be a byproduct of a nurturing relationship, the opposite can occur if the relationship is impaired. When the relationship is impaired, the individual can be adversely affected and if the individual is emotionally impaired, the relationship can be adversely affected as well.

Case Example #23

Chad and Melissa are newly married. Soon into the marriage, problems began to surface. Melissa began raising concerns that she and Chad were not getting along. She reported that Chad appeared unhappy with the relationship but refused to talk about his feelings. When approached by Melissa, he denied any having problems. Yet there were times when he was emotionally unavailable to her. Melissa stated she was willing to talk with him about any potential problem areas. However, the more she pursued him, the more he would emotionally withdraw.

Treatment revealed that Chad was uncomfortable being appropriately assertive about his feelings in the relationship. Instead, he would resist by shutting down emotionally, resisting any potential conflict. To him, any disagreement was perceived as leading to an argument. He had a total misconception as to what being appropriately assertive was like. It was revealed that as a child growing up, he had a passive father and a domineering mother. Conflict of any kind was never tolerated in the home. As a consequence, Chad learned to cope by internalizing his emotions, avoiding conflict at all costs.

Chad's behavior didn't allow himself or Melissa the opportunity to grow emotionally. This adversely affected their relationship. The dysfunctional relationship in turn adversely affected Chad's feelings about himself. In order for the relationship to improve, Chad had to begin to trust that he could begin to reveal himself without fearing that Melissa would become angry and argue with him. Conversely, in order for Chad to trust that he could be open and honest, Melissa needed to create an atmosphere that was nonthreatening and supportive. Once there was a balance between examining the inside as well appropriately examining the outside, mutual support and validation between the two evolved. The power of the mutually supportive relationship healed past wounds that Chad had exhibited. Both had to learn to risk however.

2. Cognitive/behavioral restructuring in order to achieve one's goals;

It is possible to assume that much of the dysfunctional interactions between two people in a relationship are tied to the distorted thought patterns, which in turn leads to non-effective behavior. Rian McMullin, like many other theorists, subscribes to the theory that a particular incident or event can set into motion a series of reactions depending on its affect on the person. The trigger could be a particular situation that the people find themselves in, a stressor from within the person's environment or a stimulus from the past. The trigger elicits a feeling, which in turn, unconsciously triggers a perception of reality based on that feeling. This results in a conscious reaction or behavior. Thus the assertion is that the situation or trigger causes a feeling which in turn, results in a reaction of some sort.

As a result of such perceptions, which is usually based only on gut level feelings, people are often heard to say such things as, "You really make me angry," "He got me upset," or She causes me to feel badly about myself." These types of statements are so commonplace that they are thought to be true. According to McMullin, people don't realize that their conscious reaction toward many things in their world is based merely on feelings and thoughts about a particular situation. These thoughts and feelings can have little to do with the present situation. In all likelihood their origins are in the person's early childhood experiences. If the particular thoughts and feelings are associated, on an unconscious level, with a negative memory, then the perception about the present situation will be negative. If the particular feelings and thoughts are associated with a positive memory, then the perception about the present situation will be positive. The conscious reaction to a present situation will be based on the perception and not the true reality of the situation (McMullin, 2000).

McMullin believes that actual outside situations or occurrences have little power over people. He believes that people's thoughts and feelings about the outside occurrences is where the importance lies. If they close their eyes or cover their ears, the outside world would disappear and its affects would be minimal. Outside things, therefore, have no magical powers and can not sneak inside people's heads creating certain feelings. He theorizes that it is not the situation that causes people to react in certain ways but rather their thoughts, beliefs or perceptions about that situation. Here the brain is the important key component. It takes in the raw information and then molds it into particular patterns, themes and stories that have more to do with people's "internal reality" as opposed to reality itself. These individual interpretations of any given situation are more often than not influenced by past experiences that have been repeated often enough to form a pattern in the mind. People then react almost instinctively to situations that they are exposed to.

In order for people to change their behavior in any given situation, they must first change their thoughts about the situation. This is easier said than done. With years of programming in thinking in a particular way about situations, sudden changes in thought patterns are initially resisted. More often than not, there is an automatic and often unconscious thought process of perceiving one's world that results in certain behaviors. In order to change this pattern of thought and the reactive behavior that often follows, people need to slow down the process and challenge the validity of the internal thought process about any given situation. The only way to do this is by consciously aware of the perceptions and where they come from. Next they need to be replaced with an altered reality that is not based on pure emotions (Ellis, 2011).

The desire to change non productive behavior must outweigh the powerful cognitions or the thought process that reinforce that behavior. There has to be a willingness to challenge old, worn out beliefs that are no longer useful in dealing with one's world. People need to understand the powerful influences thoughts about any given situation have on one's reaction to it. People in relationships often think that getting out of a relationship (situation) is the best behavioral reaction. In some cases that may be true and is a common reaction. However, before any decision is made, examining one's feelings and the thoughts that are associated with that particular situation is a vital first step. Otherwise the likelihood of repeating the pattern with someone else is great.

3. Understanding in order to be understood;

Case Example #24

John and Mary illustrate the constant struggle that goes on between couples needing to be understood versus understanding the other person in a relationship. John had on more than one occasion complained to his wife, Mary, that she failed to recognize or acknowledge the many things he did around the house. He found that she would zero right in on the one thing he had overlooked and quickly bring it to his attention. In the same token, John complained that Mary did not address his needs or wants. As an example, he reported that during a recent telephone conversation with his wife, he asked her if she had done something that he had asked her to do. Her response was to tell him "no" and that she had forgotten. He half heartedly attempted to hide his disappointment.

Later, when John was home, he learned inadvertently that his wife had followed through on two other requests that he had made of her earlier that day. Even after he had noticed them he had not thought to mention them to Mary. However, he did mention again to her his disappointment in her not following through on the request he made to her earlier.

At that point Mary calmly brought to his attention that it was interesting John had focused on the one thing she had not done for him but made no mention of the other things that she had done. It became evident that John would become defensive and feel misunderstood when any of his needs were not met. Yet by the same token, he would often inadvertently disregard the things that Mary would do for him.

John's experience is typical of many couples in relationships who attempt to be understood, yet fail to understand the other person. John's self absorption is an example of his not being in charge of his own personhood. John needed to learn that his sense of self could not continue to be dependent on how he thought Mary should be treating him. He learned to take charge of his own destiny. In doing this he was more open to recognize and understand where Mary was coming from. He realized that he was spending too much time focusing on wanting to be understood but far too little time understanding Mary.

Steven Covey states that the most important principle he has found to be the key to effective interpersonal communication is to: *Seek first to understand, then to be understood.* He describes the four parts of communication as reading, writing, speaking and listening. People spend years learning how to read, write and speak. Yet it is questionable how much training people have in learning the art of truly listening? Truly listening involves being at the point of really, deeply understanding another human being from that individual's point of reference. This is that higher level of thought processing of the brain that was addressed in the first chapter.

To achieve this level of thinking requires a paradigm shift or altering the way of looking at empathic listening. Typically people seek first to be understood. Most people don't listen with the intent of understanding but rather are focused on what they want to say in reply to the speaker. During a verbal exchange with another person, most people are either speaking or preparing to speak. Truly listening is the last thing they are thinking about. Even if they make an attempt to listen, it is usually through filtered emotional lenses that take in only what is agreed with (Covey, 2000).

Case Example #25

Joyce, a patient, *reported that she wanted a more open and honest relationship with her teenage daughter, Jill. Joyce found her daughter to be reticent in sharing much with her. Joyce thought she had lost the closeness she once experienced with Jill when Jill was younger. She reported to want to recapture that closeness. She went on to state that she wanted to truly understand her daughter and what impediments there were to recapturing the former closeness.*

Mother and daughter were invited to both come in for a session. At first Jill was reluctant to speak. After a few minute, with her mother's encouragement, she began to open up and communicate her feelings. She revealed that a large part of her difficulties was with her mother's not listening but quick at giving her unsolicited advice. Instead of listening and empathizing with her daughter, Joyce began to cut Jill off, telling her how wrong she was in her thinking. Joyce went on to tell Jill what the true "reality" was, so her daughter could understand it. With that, the Jill began to close down in a shroud of silence, leaving the mother perplexed as to what was wrong. Joyce was unaware that she really wanted to get her daughter to understand and agree with her, rather than to finally understand her daughter and where she was coming from. Joyce mistakenly thought saying that she wanted open communication with her daughter would automatically make it so. What she failed to understand was that the key to achieving closeness with Jill was by exemplifying truly listening, understanding and empathizing with her rather than lecturing. Joyce needed to learn to listen without interrupting her daughter. Only when Jill felt listened to and understood by her mother, could she begin to open up to her.

What was going on between Joyce and her daughter Jill is equally true with people in general. People, generally in relationships, struggle with trying to maintain a balance between understanding the other person and being understood by that person. The road to understanding the other person is paved with good intentions. Achievement of this goal begins with curbing the urge to speak and listening with a sense of empathy

As was reported in an earlier chapter of this book, empathy is a higher order of cognition of the brain. It appears more pronounced in women than in men (Kalbfleisch,1993). However, this does not mean that men can not develop this aspect of their brain. Empathic listening involves both the right side and left side of the brain. It involves listening not only with the ears but also with the eyes. This means taking in the behavior of the other person, as well as intuitively taking in the other person's feelings.

Initially this may sound overwhelming to some individuals. However, in order to be effective in communications, empathetic listening that involves the ears to hear, the eyes to take in the behavior and one's intuition to take in the feelings. Communication researchers estimate that only 10% of communication is represented by words spoken. Another 30% is represented by sounds of the tone made and 60% by the body language and facial expressions (Covey, 2000).

When speaking of empathic listening, Covey is referring to listening with the intent to understand. To him, listening here means first really understanding the other person emotionally as well as intellectually. Covey goes on to state that the feeling of being truly empathically listened to, was deeply therapeutic and healing. He theorized that next to physical survival, the greatest need of humans is psychological survival. To him this meant to be understood, to be affirmed, to be validated, to be appreciated.

Seeking first to understand as opposed to insisting on first being understood is a key principle in many areas of life. In order to decide what direction to go or what action to take, the person needs to first diagnose the situation. This can not happen accurately unless all the facts are known. Being skilled in this area goes a long way in being in charge of one's life. However, rushing to judgment cuts off effective communication and jeopardizes greater understanding and self determination.

Though empathic listening takes time, it does not take nearly as much time as it does to correct misunderstandings. To circumvent possible problems, people need to be slow to answer. This is especially true when the other person may only looking to vent and be listened to. Trying to mold the environment into one's own way of thinking only leads to frustration and a sense of powerlessness. However, understanding the other person's point of view first will enhance a sense of personal power. Resisting the urge to jump in and speak strengthens self control and the feeling of being in charge of oneself.

Harville Hendrix describes empathy as the capacity to imagine how another might experience whatever it is they are talking about on a *feeling* level. To him, it is the capacity to be attuned to the feelings of another person based on what has been said. This differs from merely assuming what the person is feeling in that situation.

Hendrix goes on to discuss the responsibilities of both the receiver and the sender of the message. As Hendrix views it, for the receiver, empathy requires going deeper than merely what the other person has said. It gets into how the other person is feeling to the extent of actually

allowing themselves to experience how the other person must be feeling. In turn, he views the responsibility of the sender of the message to check out and let the receiver know if he or she has heard what has been said.

Closely attuned to empathy is validation. To Hendrix, validation is the skill of communicating to another a clear understanding, non- judgmentally the other person's point of view. It means understanding the logic of the other person's perspective and accepting its validity. It does not mean agreeing or sharing the same perspective of the other person. This is what is confusing to couples. People mistakenly think that validating or conveying that they truly understand the other person's point of view means agreement. It does not necessarily mean that. However, validating or truly understanding where the other person is coming from makes for a connectedness between two people on a deeper level. It indeed brings couples closer to intimacy (Hendrix, 2008)

4. Examining the interdependency between personal growth and satisfying relationships;

The inner world of one's mind or intra-psychic and the outer world of one's environment or the interpersonal cannot be separated in a neat separate package. In order to experience a balanced existence, people need to blend and unify their inner world, which includes past influences, with their outer world, which includes relationships and all of their complexities.

Relationships can provide a tremendous vehicle for personal growth, regardless of its nature or duration. Patterns learned from the past tend to get replayed within the relationship in the present, thus providing opportunities to work through many of those past unresolved issues. However, far too often, too much time ruminating about past wounds. In so doing, they miss using the relationship as an opportunity for taking responsibility for personal change and taking charge of their own lives. When people examine ways of bringing about personal change within the relationship, there becomes a greater likelihood of strengthening the relationship. If the relationship ends because the differences are too great and the willingness to negotiate a compromise too small, then at least there will be a greater clarity of personal needs, values and expectations. From this, the person can take responsibility to appropriately address them without blaming the other person.

5. Food for thought;

Summary

Personal growth typically has been thought to largely involve individual examination and self-reflection alone. However, as individuals attempt to go through this process, they often gravitate towards mates who will consciously or unconsciously help them work through the unresolved issues, past and present. There are countless opportunities during the course of

each day to emotionally heal and personally grow through listening and reflecting within the context of a relationship. It does not have to be an intimate relationship. It can be in a chance meeting during the course of one's day that can provide that opportunity for personal growth. In order for this to happen, one must listen in the present with openness and curiosity. This is easier said than done. In spite of the best of intentions, prior unconscious programming of the brain has created patterns of thinking that result in the present looking very much like the old engrained patterns of the past.

Historical patterns of the past may no longer be functional in the present. An openness to new ways of thinking can be most beneficial. This can provide opportunities to resolve old personal and relational problems in new and different ways. Listening on a deeper level to the implicit message beneath the explicit message can be enlightening. This requires a suspension of defensiveness. The question to be asked is, "What unresolved issue from my past has suddenly causes me to become defensive with the other person in the present?"

This requires consciously thinking in such a way that moves the person from being self-condemning to self- affirming. Introducing a new way of thinking about oneself can result in behavioral changes that will in turn reinforce newly developed thought patterns. It matters little if the new thought patterns are believed or not. The brain does not distinguish truth from fiction. It only "believes" what is repetitively fed into it. Therefore, as positive self- talk is introduced repetitively, the brain will begin to reprogram itself the new messages feed into it. This will result in more openness to positive support and affirmation from one's partner. Conversely, there can be a decrease in defensiveness if one's partner is less than positive.

As people go through life, how they view themselves is usually in the context of relationships with others. Though personal fulfillment is a uniquely individual experience, relationships do have an effect. Therefore, though the road to personal growth is a solitary one, it can not be made in a vacuum. The journey, for better or worse, is made in the context of relationships. The challenge is to take charge of one's own life while being in productive relationships. Taking charge of your own life and not allowing others to do so requires self respect and resisting pressures to be other than who you are. Being genuine to oneself while struggling with relationships, can be daunting at times. It is a task is well worth the experience when the relationship is a mutually satisfying one.

Building Blocks

The following questions are formulated to move the reader along in the process toward being in charge of oneself. Therefore, the reader is asked to read and reflect on the following questions. Through the reader's reflected answers doors can open up to new ways of thinking which will lead to new ways of behaving.

1.) What areas do you think you need to work on in order to positively impact the relationship?

2.) What personal changes do you think you need to make in order to feel in charge of yourself ?

3.) How can an improved relationship result in you're feeling good about yourself?

4.) How are unrealistic expectations of your partner holding you back from personal happiness?

<u>Statements about…..</u>

In this chapter, we examined more closely the interdependency between personal growth and interpersonal relationships. It is the goal of this book to assist the reader in gravitating toward a higher level of personal growth and relational intimacy. The byproduct of this achievement is to be in charge of oneself and one's own destiny. This is in place of going through life like a piece of driftwood, pushed by the tides of life in one direction or another. With this in mind, the reader is asked to kindly circle the following Statements "Agree, Disagree or Uncertain" (A,D,U). Upon completion, the reader is asked to reflect on the results in order to enhance awareness which, previously stated, is the first step toward change. From this, the possibilities of formulating new directions become within reach.

1.) I feel that my happiness is ultimately my responsibility to achieve. A D U

2.) I feel I can express myself freely to my partner without being judged. A D U

3.) I feel heard by my partner. A D U

4.) I am able to truly listen to my partner on a regular basis. A D U

5.) I feel validated and understood by my partner. A D U

6.) I make conscious efforts to validate and understand my partner. A D U

7.) I am able to realistically accept my partner's strengths and weaknesses. A D U

8.) I try hard not to take my partner for granted but show genuine appreciation. A D U

9.) I receive spontaneous signs of affection and unsolicited thoughtfulness. A D U

10.) I show spontaneous signs of affection and unsolicited thoughtfulness. A D U

Hopefully these statements will provide the reader with food for thought that will result in some modification of thought and behavior. As before, any statements responded as "Uncertain" may need further exploration that would shed light on reasons for the uncertainly and what needs to be done to make the answers specifically a "Agree" or "Disagree". From this point the reader can determine whether or not there are changes that may need to be made.

Ultimately achieving being in charge of oneself is accomplished by setting small goals that are small enough to be non-threatening, yet large enough to accomplish results. The goals need to be accomplished through a process that has a beginning and an end. For each goal, the reader will need to stretch enough to measurably move forward but not so much where it becomes terribly uncomfortable.

Journaling progress can help to keep the reader on track. It is easy to focus on the setbacks. In journaling, focus on your the successes in any given day. Write down examples of emotional growth, behaviors exhibited that were positive in nature and steps taken toward the ultimate goal of being in charge of one's life. Document daily improvement and what is learned from small setbacks..

The reader needs to be aware that setbacks along the way must not be interpreted as evidence of an inability to change. Instead they should be used as learning tools from which the necessary adjustments can be made. Even falling short of meeting a particular goal can be treated as a success provided sincere attempts are made. Remember, to be gentle with oneself and continue to persevere focusing on the ultimate goal.

10

"A great deal of talent is lost to the world for want of a little courage." - Sydney Smith

1. Examining various case scenarios as they relate to integrating personal growth and relational intimacies;

Adrian James and Kate Wilson (1986) view conflicts in relationships as rarely "caused" by only one partner. They view conflict resulting from an unconscious collusion on the part of both parties.. They go on to report that an unconscious agreement between the couple defends them against dealing with the real underlying issues in their relationship. As a result, the difficulty is usually a shared one. Each blames the other for their problem, with little recognition of their part in its continuation. Ultimately, the problem is a shared responsibility of both. For example, if one partner is struggling with unresolved feelings around intimacy, the behavior of both is likely to reinforce the avoidance in dealing effectively with the issue at hand..

James and Wilson identify typical defenses that couples utilize when dealing with their emotions and feelings around potential conflict. Some of the more common defenses that may be utilized include the following which the reader may recognize.

- ✓ ***Splitting.*** This is when one partner deals with the emotional conflict by thinking of the other partner dualistically in terms of opposites. An extreme example of this would be if one partner perceives himself as being exclusively understanding, victimized and right while perceiving the other to the opposite such as exclusively self absorbed, the emotional and wrong.

- ✓ ***Denial.*** In this case one partner refuses to acknowledge the external reality and emotional pain that is apparent to the other partner.

- ✓ ***Projection.*** Here one partner deals with the emotional conflict between them by attributing his unacceptable feelings or thoughts about it onto the other partner.

- ✓ ***Projective identification.*** Here the individual falsely attributes to his partner the unacceptable feelings and thoughts. This is different than simple projection. With projective identification, the partner is aware of his or her own affects and impulsive behavior but misattributes them as a way of justifying his to the other person.

These defenses are implemented on an unconscious level. Being more aware will bring them to the conscious level, where they can be challenged and appropriately dealt with.

When dealing with conflict, it is not unusual for couples to focus on the perceived flaws of the other person. During those periods of high stress, it is easy to minimize or even overlook any positive qualities of one's partner. However, focusing only on the perceived flaws of the

other person, in the middle of a conflict, only brings forth defensiveness, not resolution. It would be more useful to take a moment to calm down, even walk away from the situation for a moment. Taking the time to process and gather one's thoughts, go a long way to resolving the issue at hand. Admittedly, this is easier said than done, but vital when trying to resolve a conflict.

Another problem area for couples dealing with conflict is not sticking with the issue. It's common for one partner to bring up an extraneous issue not relevant to the issue at hand. Preceding with a question such as, "What about you?" usually results in deflecting from the issue first brought up. This mode of behavior reinforces the endless cycle of repeating the same thing over and over with no resolution in sight. It is therefore imperative that couple stick with one issue at a time. Once that one issue is sufficiently dealt with, then they can go onto the next issue. Sticking with one issue at a time stands the best chance of obtaining closure and resolution.

Couples run into problems when they disown their own culpability and attribute what they see as wrong with the relationship to their partners. Usually the only part of the problem they view themselves as responsible for is staying with the partner in the first place. The partner never leaves and the problems never get resolved. With this type of mentality, there can be no resolution to their conflict. In problem relations, there rarely is a simple right or wrong. In actuality there is usually a mixture of both. These types of relationships can improve when each recognizes and takes responsibility for their part in the problem. Focusing only on what they perceive as wrong with the other person, is a sure way of reinforcing a continuation of maladaptive behavior.

Couples in conflict typically focus on the everyday irritants rather than the deeper underlying issues that never get addressed. A simple disagreement over who will pick the children up from school may be hiding a deep resentment over feeling unappreciated and taken for granted in the relationship. Not identifying and dealing with these important unresolved issues is a recipe for the continuation of the same circular complaints, ending up in the same position they started with.

Though there is no "one size fits all" type of problem relationship, there can be some predictable underlying themes that manifest themselves. Couples often come into counseling bringing up issues of conflict that repeat themselves, yet never get resolved. These couples soon discover that the issues that repeat themselves are surface issues that unconsciously hide deeper underlying issues never dealt. Once these underlying issues are consciously brought to the surface and dealt with, healing can take place. This does not happen overnight. It takes commitment and a willingness to work hard at identifying, addressing and negotiating getting their core needs met.

In the following case scenarios, we will show how taking personal responsibility for changing oneself is the key to being in charge of oneself. These case scenarios will give the reader a sense of the styles that are viewed as the most prevalent with couples in conflict. Striving to be in charge of oneself as opposed to allowing others to take charge, holds the greatest chance of successful living. Taking responsibility for one's personal growth can bring about positive change in the relationship. Conversely, positive change in the relationship can bring about personal growth.

These case scenarios, as with all case examples throughout this book, are fictitious in nature. Any similarities to real life individuals or couples are purely coincidental. However, they relate the reader specific relational problem issues that are all too common with couples today.

Case Scenario #1

The caretaker and narcissistic couple

Presenting problem;

        Jane was a 56 year old twice divorced woman who came into treatment after recommendations from relatives. She was in a relationship with a man named Jim. She viewed him as being different than her previous husbands, who were physically and/or emotionally abusive, alcoholic and/or womanizers. This one was different. He worked, claimed to have a lot of money and found her extremely attractive and he treated her "good." Yet soon the luster wore off. Jim was discovered to be a functional alcoholic, which she was able to rationalize away because she did not want to lose him. She instead considered all the good qualities he had exhibited the first few weeks of their relationship. She was convinced that these qualities could be brought out again if he had "the right woman". She considered herself to be just that type of woman.

        Jane found herself instead constantly falling short of Jim's expectations, resulting in his extreme disappointment in her. Jim falsely accused her of having an affair with one of her co-workers at her job. This was in spite of Jane's constant denials and reassurance that he had no reason to question her. Interspersed with their occasionally going out to dinner and out on trips, Jane had to deal with Jim's caustic put downs, trivial and unreasonable demands and disapproving comments and hurtful name calling.

        In spite of ample evidence pointing to a dysfunctional relationship, Jane insisted on continuing the relationship claiming that he needed her and that somehow his love for her would result in their being able to work things out. She also thought that on some level, she may have been inadvertently provoking his behavior toward her. She thought she was lucky to have a man such as the one that he portrayed. She thought that if she tried harder, she would get him to trust her more. Though she herself couldn't determine the cause, Jane was able to recognize that something was wrong in the relationship or she would be happier than she was. Jane had suggested they both get involved in couple's counseling but he refused claiming it would be a waste of time. Besides, he insisted that all she needed to do was to be more honest with him and follow through on things when she said she would do. Hence she came to therapy alone in order to find out what she could do to make the relationship better.

Family background information:

Jane taking on this mantle of victimization started long before she met Jim. Her father died when she was quite young. Prior to his death, she was told by him to care for her mother. From that point she felt responsible for her mother's wellbeing. Her mother in turn expected Jane to meet her needs and constantly put her down when she did not.

With her father dying at an early age, Jane was forced to depend solely on the approval of her mother as a sign of love and affection. Her mother's disapproval only acted to reinforce Jane to try harder. She never doubted for a moment that if she felt short of her mother's expectations, the problem may have rested with her and not her mother. Jane's early childhood experience has resulted in her confusion as to how to experience love and affection. The abusive situations she encounters with Jim are not perceived as abuse from a man who is egocentric and self- absorbed. If she did, she would have become angry and ended the relationship quickly. Instead she rationalized that she wasn't doing enough to bring out the love she was sure he felt for her. This left her feeling guilty about falling short of his expectations.

The kind of emotional abuse Jane was experiencing is, in many ways, as detrimental as physical abuse. Engel (2002) defines emotional abuse as any nonphysical behavior that is designed to control, intimidate, subjugate, demean, punish or isolate another person through the use of degradation, humiliation or fear. She goes on to list various types of emotional abuse but one that stands out and is common is the constant criticism of falling short of the unrealistic expectations of the loved one. This need not take the form of yelling and screaming. It can also be masked behind the subtle put downs through sarcastic humor. Worst of all, it can take the form of the silent withdrawal of love and affection by the abuser. This form of emotional blackmail is a manipulating way of getting what is wanted through playing on the others' guilt, fear or compassion. Over time, these types of abuse eats away at the partner's self- confidence and sense of self- worth, undermining any good feelings about oneself and one's accomplishments.

When the abusers place unrealistic expectations on their partners, they expect everything to be set aside in order to satisfy their needs. As with Jane, the unrealistic expectations can never be fully met, because there is always something more that has to be done. Hence, the constant criticism and put downs come forth because the abuser's needs are not fulfilled satisfactorily (Engel, 2002).

In regards to Jane, it is easy to understand how years of reinforcement by her mother adversely influenced her choice in a partner in a relationship. In her unconscious attempt to work through unfinished business with her mother, she repeated the same dysfunctional thought and behavior pattern with Jim. In growing up, she wished to rescue and protect her mother. In spite of her best efforts, she typically fell short. As an adult, she was attracted to a man who needed to be rescued from something as well. However, she also thought Jim was above her and she was lucky to have him love her.

109

One may ask how could she love such a man and continue to put up with the kind of abuse he was giving to her. The answer in part lies in a story related to the reader elsewhere in this book that bears repeating. It pertains to a patient in an inpatient behavioral health unit of a local hospital. This patient, though highly dysfunctional, was able to easily get into relationships. When asked how his life was in so much disarray in all aspects of his life except in the area of courting women, his answer was plain. "I am able to keep it together long enough for the women to fall for me and once they fall for me, they have a hard time letting go."

Once Jane fell for the behavior exhibited by Jim during the "honeymoon stage" of the relationship, she was hard pressed to acknowledge the "red flags" that were surfacing. Jane could not recognize that she was being emotionally abused. Typical of countless men and women in similar relationships, Jane's self- esteem, self- confidence and ways she had previously defined herself, began to slowly, systematically erode. When one thinks of a relationship that has gone bad, the common view is that something dramatic has happened such as an outside affair, chronic physical abuse or a sudden loss. However, more often not, it is the routine, subtle day-in, day-out repetitive conflicts that involve put downs and belittlement that destroy relationships. These dysfunctional ways of interacting are the major causes of breakdowns and eventual breakup of relationships.

Jane's interaction with Jim ranged from his belittling and criticizing her to his subtle messages that she fell short of his expectations. Jim consistently put his needs above hers and conveyed an attitude of entitlement.

Jane reported staying in the relationship because she loved him. She went back to the first few weeks of their dating and how attentive he was. She rationalized that this was the true Jim and that his current behavior was merely a defense to protect him from being hurt. Jane failed to entertain the idea that Jim's current behavior was his true baseline of functioning. In the early phase of the relationship Jim was able to portray an image that would be attractive to her.

 Jane did not consciously set out to become a victim in this dysfunctional relationship when she first became romantically involved with Jim. This was no more the case with Jim setting out to emotionally victimize Jane. In actuality, he cared for her very much. Jane mistakenly thought that the problem was limited only to the relationship. Her thoughts were that if only Jim was able to trust her, he'd be his former self again. She failed to understand that her behavior was not the source of her problem with Jim. It was rather how she thought about the situation she was in. These thoughts, though exhibited in the here and now, had their roots in her distant past.

Outcome:

In order to break this vicious cycle, Jane needed to recognize and challenge a core thought or belief that she learned at an early age and which governed how she behaved in her intimate relationship. Her internal tape was "hotwired" into her brain to unquestionably say, "In

order to find happiness, I need to make the other person happy no matter what the cost to me." Further, "My value only comes from helping those in need and if I fall short of meeting those needs, I have then failed and am not worthy of the love of the other person."

Jane, through counseling, began to challenge old outmoded ideas she had about herself and Jim that caused her to feel and consequently behave in particular ways. Once becoming more aware of what was going on with her unconsciously, Jane soon discovered repeated patterns of beliefs and emotions. She was then able to discern her patterns of thinking that reinforced the outmoded thoughts she learned as a child in growing up. These learned patterns, though no longer functional, had now become engrained in her psyche.

To understand Jane's struggle with a new way of thinking and behaving, visualize the following. You're going down the same five steps for years. After awhile going down those steps becomes so much a part of your thought process, that you unconsciously expect one step to follow the other. Now introduce an additional step and see how much that throws you off. You will now need to reprogram yourself to include the additional step.

For Jane, introducing a new way of thinking about the nature of her relationship was like introducing "the additional step" in our example. It was awkward at first and on some level rejected by her unconscious mind. However, slowly, consistently she meditated on the new perceptual shift and thus created a new pathway in her brain. This, in turn, gave Jane another option besides acquiescing to the expectations of Jim because she thought it was the only thing she could do.

With Jim refusing counseling, Jane was left to come in alone and work on herself. In addition to becoming aware of repeated patterns, Jane was also able to recognize the sources. In Jane's case, it clearly started in her early childhood. As previously stated, during her early years she was given messages that stated that her value lied in her taking care of others and doing things for them rather than appropriately considering that she herself had personal needs that were not being addressed. In focusing on her mother's needs, her own needs were disregarded. As a result, Jane never learned to give to herself. Though Jane wanted to experience a loving relationship, she only knew love if it was attached to rejection as well, hence her dysfunctional relationship with Jim.

On the flip side, it was reported by Jane that Jim grew up with a mother who was in and out of mental institutions during most of his formative years. His father was away most of the time at work and when home behaved in a distant detached manner toward his son. Jim was basically raised by an older sister who resented being stuck home to care for him instead of being out socializing and was not hesitant to show how trapped she felt with him. Similar to Jane, Jim repeated a pattern learned from childhood in his relationship with his partner.

The only way Jane was going to change this pattern, was to begin to feel good about herself regardless of whether or not she is in a relationship. In order to begin to feel good about

herself, she needed to rethink the image she had integrated of herself and how it adversely affected her relationship with Jim. Jane recognized that she did not behave in the way she did in a vacuum. In the relationship, what Jim said and did "pressed her buttons" and triggered her thought process which in turn activated her repetitive behavior. Jane continued with treatment, becoming more aware of how her thoughts about how Jim's behavior was influencing the way she related to him. From there she was able to recognize how this dysfunctional way of thinking was sabotaging true happiness for her.

Jane began to replace dysfunctional thinking with a more rational way of viewing her herself and the world around her. This allowed her to take the risks necessary for her to deal effectively with her issues. She was able to focus on herself, clarifying her own needs for herself, as well as those within a relationship. In addition, she was able to take a hard look at her relationship with Jim, objectively weighing what she was getting out of the relationship versus what she was not. As Jane felt better about herself, she was able to articulate to Jim her needs while being sensitive to his needs as well. A willingness to negotiate set a different tone in the relationship rather than her pattern of acquiescing to his every demand.

As Jane changed her way of thinking about Jim's behavior toward her and her reactions to it, there came an adjustment in the way she reacted to Jim's behavior thus placing him in a position he was not comfortable in. He initially resisted, preferring Jane to stay as she was. Her changing would force him to change in order to adjust to her new style of relating. As treatment progressed, Jane began to have a better sense of who she was as a person. She no longer viewed giving to herself as being selfish but rather a way of replenishing herself in order to be more present for others. With an improved way of thinking about herself and her place in relationships she began to feel more self confident and in charge of herself. As a result, she began relating and reacting to Jim differently. No longer were her feelings about herself tied into what he said about her but rather how she felt about herself.

In order for this relationship to work, Jim had to make the necessary adjustments in order to accommodate Jane's needs as well as his own. Jane now viewed her needs as valid and thought of herself as worthy of having them met. She identified her needs going well beyond the surface needs of Jim taking her places. It went deeper with the need to be valued in her own right as a person, warts and all. If Jim could not move beyond selfishly focusing getting his own needs met regardless of hers, then the relationship would be doomed. Jane began to recognize that she was deserving of better than she was settling for. If Jim could not appropriate meet her needs, she was willing to accept the need to move on. This did not mean that Jim as wrong or uncaring but merely someone whose needs were too different from hers to be negotiated to a mutually satisfying resolution. For Jane to leave Jim would not be easy and painless. However, "rewiring" her way of thinking about herself eventually paid off in the renewed security of knowing she could make it on her own if need be. She came to realize that taking charge of her own life gave her the freedom of not being adversely influenced by those from her past being relayed by those in her present.

Jane and Jim are still dating. However, Jane is taking it slowly. She now is more aware of her own needs as well as Jim's. As a result, the nature of the relationship has changed, with it moving toward more of a give and take. Jim is still struggling with these changes in Jane. He is slowly attempting to make necessary changes of his own. Jane is taking the necessary small steps on a daily basis in order to secure for her the greatest chance of success.

Case Scenario #2

The pursuing versus distancing couple:

Presenting problem;

Mary was a 42 year old married woman who came into treatment with feelings of depression. She was married to John whom she didn't feel very close to. The couple was initially drawn toward one another because they were comfortable with one another and seemingly shared similar values. Mary was also drawn to John's quiet strength and John was drawn to Mary's initial outward expression of emotions.

Soon after marriage, John began to withdraw into himself. He rationalized that he was doing fine, in that he was working hard, came home right after work, didn't drink or gamble and gave Mary virtually his whole pay check. He had settled into a routine. However, Mary was beginning to show signs of dissatisfaction with the marriage. His theorized that he was doing the best he could and that Mary's views of marriage were a bit unrealistic. She never seemed satisfied. As a result, John ended up confused, lonely and he began to isolate himself. The more Mary would attempt to bring up issues she was dissatisfied with the more he would avoid and turn into himself. He wanted to improve their marriage but thought his wife "bugged" him too much. John was uncomfortable with having to deal with anything he thought would be unpleasant and Mary appeared to often bring up unpleasantness.

As reported, Mary viewed John as being very attentive and giving during the early stages of the marriage. He had been very different than other men she had dated who had basically cared only about their needs. However, during Mary's first pregnancy, things began to change. Mary's body was going through tremendous changes. She didn't feel good about herself and how she thought she looked. As a result, she began to become more irritable and cranky, looking to John for support. John, who grew up in a home where feelings were never talked about, was clueless as to how to interpret Mary's behavior, much less talk about it. As a result he shut down. Mary interpreted this as rejection, thus reinforcing her feelings of self- doubt. Her response was to pursue John and complain about his lack of attention. When that didn't work, she confronted him for his lack of consistent help. In response, John would claim to be tired from a hard day of manual labor. This was in spite of the fact that Mary too worked all day, came home and prepared supper, got their son ready for bed, and took care of household chores.

As a result of John's apparent lack of support, Mary too ended up confused, lonely and isolated. She wanted to improve their marriage but felt frustrated with John's emotional distancing and seemingly lack interest. The more she pursued him, the more he would distant himself. Thus this dysfunctional pattern reinforced the downward spiral of their relationship.

General & family background information;

John and Mary thought that it was their marital situation that resulted in the feelings they were experiencing. Actually it was their thoughts as they relate to their marriage that was the cause of their plight. To a large extent their thoughts and emotions about their present marital situation, was governed by their past upbringing. They took the problem areas of their marriage and organize it into depressing and angry patterns learned from each of their early childhoods.

John's early messages from his parents who were distant and not demonstrative reinforced his internal tape that stated, "Expressing feelings is not permissible because they may make others in the family upset and thereupon take their love away." "Avoid conflict at all cost." Sweep problems under the rug." As a result, John never knew how to get in touch with many of his feelings, much less talk about them. In growing up, he never experience closeness which in part comes from an honest and open expression of feelings.

Mary, on the other hand, grew up with parents who withdrew their love and affection whenever Mary did not behave to their liking. She soon learned that the only way she could feel a connection with her parents was through performing well in school and at home. She was quick to do chores around the house, seeking parental approval. In this way, she could get her parents attention and thereby their love. As a result, her internal tape stated, "I can only feel loved provided I perform well".

Outcome;

In order to make the necessary changes, John and Mary needed to learn where their individual pattern of thinking about and dealing with intimacy originated from. Besides recognizing them, they also needed to learn how to effectively deal with these learned patterns. In addition, each need to negotiate with a partner who grew up learning a completely different pattern.

Slowly, John learned to trust enough to risk revealing himself to Mary without fearing it would result in his being rejected. Mary learned that being with someone who needed time to reflect on what he had to say in order not to risk confrontation and rejection, did not mean she was not loved and cared for. Both ultimately learned to negotiate when dealing with differences in their relationship. Mary became more sensitive to John's need to process and carefully gather

his thoughts and formulate what he was going to say. John became more aware of Mary's need to deal with issues and "not sweep them under the carpet." They negotiated setting up timelines for dealing with potential conflict in order not to overwhelm John and satisfy Mary knowing that issue at hand would be dealt in a reasonable time period.

Mary and John perceived each of the "realities" of their relationship as the only reality. They came to learn that there were different realities perceived as equally valid by the other person. In order for John and Mary's relationship to work, they had to get to the point of realizing that when dealing with their differences, they needed to negotiate a mutually acceptable "reality" that would work for both of them. They eventually got off the merry-go-round of vainly trying to be in charge of the other and finally being in charge only of themselves.

In addition, both John and Mary realized that they had separate issues they needed to work on regardless of whether or not they were in a relationship. Working together as a couple certainly helped bring these issues to the surface and provided them an opportunity to work them through them as a couple. Trusting each other more, opened the doors for each of them to take personal responsibility for working through issues learned from their pasts, while mutually negotiating resolutions of relational issues in their present.

Case Scenario #3

The couple in a power struggle:

Presenting problem;

June and Walter were a married couple who are on the verge of breaking up. June came in for counseling complaining that she didn't feel connected to her husband in the marriage. As a matter of fact she states that Walter shared more with their young son than with her. June has been divorced once before with a husband who cheated on her and she had vowed not to end up in the same dysfunctional relationship that ended her previous marriage. She thought she finally met a man who was more mature and seemingly settled.

After the birth of their son, the "honeymoon stage" of their marriage was over. Their sex life dwindled. As a result, June focused on raising their son and keeping up the house, while working outside the home as well. Walter worked at his job and cared for the outside of their home. Though each was employed, both argued over how to handle income and expenditures.

Walter came from a highly dysfunctional family of origin. His parents and sibling were long standing alcoholics. Though Walt drank occasionally, he did not view himself to having a drinking problem. When June would bring up issues of concern, Walter would minimize them viewing her as the source of any problems. June would end up feeling badly about herself. Whenever June attempted to discipline her son, Walter would sabotage her by aligning himself with their son. June is found herself extremely frustrated and confused about herself and the state of her marriage.

Walter, on the other hand denied the part in the problem marriage, claiming that June was not committed to trying harder to make the marriage work. He minimized June's claim that he was argumentative. He reported that he was reacting to her "always getting on his case". He also did not agree with June's child rearing practice, claiming she was too hard on the boy. His view is that June didn't try hard enough to make the marriage work. When June asked what he is looking for, Walt remained silent. Both came into treatment realizing that the marriage is in deep trouble and were hard pressed to determine what changes needed to take place in order to get the marriage on track. Both realized that change was necessary in order to stop the vicious cycle and bring forth any hope for a more positive future for their relationship.

General information;

As already stated, couples come in for counseling, implicitly or explicitly blaming their partners as being the source of the problems in their relationship. Typically it is reported in one way or another that the behavior of one is really in reaction to the behavior of the other. This was no different with June and Walt.

However, let's not be blind to the fact that there are also many people who inappropriately blame themselves. This self- condemnation only serves to reinforce an already poor self image and maladapted relationship. Poor choices or decisions should only serve as a learning tool to improve, as opposed to reinforce the same old maladaptive behavior. In doing so, they deny parts of themselves.

Family background information;

June theorized that if Walter behaved in the same way he did during the early part of their relationship, her life would be more positive. As a child June internalized her unique learned pattern, which she repeated as an adult in thoughts, word, and deeds. While growing up, it was not unusual for her parents to yell and scream at each other and the children. The children were to be "seen and not heard." However, by adolescence, she picked up the same type of behavior. Her internal messages read, "In order to get anything in life, you need to be strong or people will walk all over you". June blamed Walt for her unhappiness in her marriage and she needed to stand up to his belligerent attitude in order to get it back.

Walt grew up in a totally dysfunctional household as well. Both his parents and a number of siblings were alcohol dependent. His father was physically abusive to Walt, his brothers and his mom. Walt's parents divorced and his mother abandoned the family when Walt was twelve years old. As Walt grew older, he tried to separate from the behavior of members of his extended family. It was important for him to be in control of himself and his world. Walt's internalized messages into his unconscious mind that told him, "I must maintain control over my partner or I will be abandoned and left alone."

Both June and Walter battled for control of how their money was to be spent, the frequency of their sex life and even how their son should be raised. Whenever June questioned him on any of these issues, he would put such a spin on things, claiming the problem was hers

116

and that she was never satisfied. She would end up more confused and in most cases frustrated. She didn't understand why Walt would fight her on so many things. Walt knew the marriage was in trouble and very much wanted to things to change. However, he saw the answer as June needing to change and not nag him so much. He failed to understand or take responsibility for any part in the problems facing his marriage. He rationalized that any emotional pain he inflicted on June was totally unintentional and in response to her behavior. June felt the same way about Walt. Both were engaged in a power struggle to change the other that got neither of them anywhere.

June viewed Walt as the source of the problem marriage and if he changed, the relationship would much improve. What she failed to realize was that Walt viewed her in much the same way. Walt viewed June as needing to change in order for the relationship to improve. However, each had their own set of problems that contributed to the problem relationship. However, as long as each viewed the other as the source of the problems, the struggle between them would be endless or result in dissolution of their marriage

Outcome;

As part of working on improving their relationship, Walt and Mary needed to work on their own individual issues as well. In addition to the couple being seen together, they were also seen individually. Individual therapy assisted them in working through past emotional wounds and unresolved past issues. Recognizing how each of their past experiences in growing up impacted how they related to one another, went a long way toward each taking personal responsibility for the situation they found themselves in. They learned that each deserved to be loved regardless of the power struggle that served to protect them from possible emotional pain and abandonment.

Their self awareness afforded them a solid beginning to build from. Both Walt and June had perceived themselves as being victimized by the other. Therefore they could not take responsibility for the power struggle they were enmeshed in. As they began to understand that a lot of their unresolved past was unconsciously being played out in their relationship, they slowly opened up to one another without defensiveness. They were slowly learning to be more authentic about their feelings of vulnerability. As they let go of the aggressive and confrontational persona, Walt and June were able to slowly expose their fear of being hurt and abandoned by the other. Their openness resulted in the acceptance and validation they desperately wanted. Thus, they realized that they no longer needed to struggle to be in charge of the other or struggle fighting off being taken in charge of. They now could take full responsibility of being in charge only of themselves. This in turn resulted in the intimacy they both wanted but in the past did not know how to handle.

Case Scenario #4

The co-dependent couple:

Presenting problem;

Cindy and Joe come into counseling with Cindy complaining about not trusting her husband of late. This was not always the case. The couple have been together thirteen years and married for ten years. Prior to their marriage, the couple had one child together and at the time of their marriage, Cindy was pregnant with her second child. The couple owned their own home and marriage was in their plans down the road. The second pregnancy was seen as merely hastening the process.

Cindy reported that though Joe enjoyed drinking beer after work and on weekends. He viewed it as a stress reliever that never interfered with the performance of his duties both at work and at home. Joe viewed himself as a hard worker who was a good provider for her and their children. However, according to Cindy, Joe had gotten hurt on the job and was out of work for awhile. During this time, his drinking increased progressively and continued even after he eventually went back to work. It had become so much of a problem that Cindy threatened several times to leave Joe. However, she would invariably back down after Joe would promise to stop drinking. In spite of wanting to believe him, Cindy found she could not entirely trust that Joe would not relapse and would constantly check the house and his truck for empty bottles.

Joe, on the other hand, reported that he was tired of being treated like a child. No matter what he did, he did not feel like Cindy was treating him like her partner but more like one of their children. Cindy countered by stating that Joe's constant lies made trusting him exceedingly difficult. As a result both went back and forth with each accusing the other for the failed marriage. They both reported things didn't seem as hard prior to the marriage and that perhaps it was a mistake going about it the way they did. However now with a house and kids, it's too late to turn back the clock. Both admitted that their dysfunctional way of relating to one another was not working and knew something had to change but didn't know what to do.

Family background information;

Like many people, Cindy did not give much deep level thought about her own unique needs and wants from a relationship. She was more focused on not repeating the same type of problematic relationship that her parents had. Her father was a chronic alcoholic who rarely worked and was rarely home. Her mother was a classic long suffering caretaker. Her mother worked two jobs in order to feed the family and constantly made excuses for Cindy's father's behavior. As a result, Cindy internalized messages growing up that included that men could not be trusted to be there when their partner needed them most and that women needed to be satisfied with less. However, Cindy vowed never to marry a man like her father nor be like her mother. So with Joe's initial strong work ethic and denial of a drinking problem, he seemed like the ideal partner. After the proverbial "honeymoon stage" was over and reality set in, her core belief pattern began to surface. It read, "I am not of value. Therefore I should expect to be abandoned."

Joe, on the other hand, grew up in a home where structure and consistency were not the norm. He and his brothers came and went as they pleased. Both his parents drank and were rarely there for any of the children. Joe dropped out of school and fluctuated between living at home and with his friends. As a result, he became egocentric, viewing the world as revolving around him. He felt entitled to have his needs met by others. He learned at an early age not to trust anyone and consequently, intimacy was a problem for him. This adversely affected his relationship Cindy on whom he was dependent on in many ways. However, he also resented that dependency. His inner message that he learned as a child told him, "I want closeness but can't trust that I deserve to have it."

Outcome;

 How do relationships such as this one, seemingly start out so right, yet end up going so wrong? During the honeymoon stage, they enjoyed doing the same thing, have fun together. They find the other person easy to talk to and different from the rest of the people they have gone out with. This was no different for Joe and Cindy. Both looked back at that time as a period when their relationship was good and a time that they wanted to recapture. However, as their relationship continued, differences began to surface as well as unmet needs..

For Joe and Cindy to experience a deeper type of a relationship, an openness to change needs to occur. Change was initially resisted on the part of both because of their ambivalence around change. It was desired because of the promise of an improved level of functioning. It was feared because it was taking a leap into the unknown. That is why it was important for them to make small changes that acted like building blocks moving them toward feeling better about themselves and experiencing a closer relationship.

Therefore, Cindy and Joe began working on themselves in the context of working on the relationship. This needed be done consistently with a clear purpose in mind. There were obstacles along the way both internally with motivation and insight and externally with pressures and resistance from each other. Their being consciously aware of this went a long way in helping them to deal with their unconscious bent to repeat old patterns of behavior.

As the couple worked on their relationship, they became more aware of the warning signs that were there even during the early part or "honeymoon stage" of the relationship. However, initially they tended to ignore or minimize those warning signs, thinking that they will go away once their marriage was well along. When reality set in, the problems or concerns had not gone away but rather had become more entrenched and prevalent. Their differences had become problems that were viewed in the mode of a right/wrong mentality.

Joe and Cindy began to recognize their differences and not judge them as either right or wrong. Instead they were able to talk about them right up front and negotiate a resolution. To get to that point was not an easy process. There were times when it seemed like they were slowly moving forward while quickly drifting back. However, practice and perseverance, in spite of set backs, was the key to their taking charge of only their own lives.

3. Final food for thought;

Summary

You have to believe something different can happen in your life and work toward that every day of your life. You already do it with self defeating thoughts. You can certainly reverse that way of thinking to thoughts and behaviors that gives you a better life. It is not unusual for individuals and couples want to *feel* better as opposed to *be* better. People usually go for counseling in times of crisis, where the emotional stress is uncomfortable enough to motivate them to want change. However, once the immediate crisis has passed and the emotional distress has subsided, the motivation can diminish. However, there are many who stick it out and who take personal responsibility for making the necessary changes in order to take charge of their lives.

Taking charge of oneself is easier said than done. Pressures from a variety of sources influence people's lives. They include those from society, religion, the media, family of origin, significant others, as well as genetic underpinnings. In spite of these important influences, adults can still begin to take charge of their own lives an many ways and on many levels. The final choice is whether or not you want to define who you are or continue to allow others to define you.

"No man (or woman) is an island. There is an interdependence between personal growth and satisfying relationships. Satisfying relationships can be viewed as important vehicles for personal healing, growth and achieving intimacy. By the same token, people who are in relationships can grow to the extent of being open to self- examination within the context of the relationship.

For many people, one of the biggest stumbling blocks to successful relationships is the lack of intimacy. It happens when people don't feel heard and understood. It happens when people feel taken for granted and not validated as important in the relationship. It happens when peoples' own needs are viewed as more important than those of their partners. Finally, it happens when too much time is spent focusing on the flaws of the other person and trying to fix them.

People will discover as they go through life that there are needs that can not or will not be met by others. This does not mean the one partner who does not totally meet the needs of the other is wrong or bad but merely different. This leaves each of the partners deciding whether core needs are being met that offset those that are not. If appropriate compromises can be made, then relationships can be long lasting in spite of such differences.

Many people, either consciously and unconsciously, place others in charge of their lives. They depend on others to make their lives better. When people do this, they miss out on the essence of life and the many opportunities that yet lie before them. Each person is on a journey through a life of self- discovery. The goal is to be authentically their true selves. Somewhere along the way, they hopefully will choose partners that grow with them in this journey. If this happens, then   as the relationship grows, the person grows and as the person grows, the relationship grows.

Each individual must assume the responsibility of managing their part in what goes in their lives and how it gets played out in a particular relationship. Insight in and of itself doesn't make the necessary changes nor does taking personal responsibility bring about change in one felt swoop. In order to effect lasting change, the effort needs to be an ongoing process, much like physical exercising or eating healthy foods. People can't exercise once or intermittently and expect to get the lasting results desired. As people become aware of their own distorted way of thinking and their resultant behavior style, they can then begin to develop strategies that will prevent the personal and interpersonal problems that confront them. This is taking charge of oneself. To begin this process of taking personal charge means to consciously think and conceive of oneself in ways that are contrary to those old maladaptive messages. Though difficult at first, this needs to be done consistently and vividly regardless of whether or not they are totally believed (Ellis,2005).

When people think about developing a relationship, it is typically in reference to other people, be it with partners, family members, those at work or people in generally. Yet what is far too often missed, but of equal or greater importance, is developing a positive relationship with oneself. Books are read, workshops are attended that teach people how to deal with difficult other people. But the one that each of us spent the greatest amount of time with is ourselves. Yet how mush of the time spent with oneself, is spent thinking ill of oneself?

People need to change their thinking about themselves and their behavior just as consistently and diligently as they would think about any other habitual activity. Nurturing a positive relationship with oneself requires the same time and commitment as it would take to nurture a relationship with another person. However, to do so to oneself will bring forth the personal fulfillment so much desired.

Each individual is on a personal journey of self- discovery and hopefully, before death, personal charge of oneself in a determined way. Positive relationships people have with others as well as with themselves can assist in this journey or act as an impediment to its being accomplished. Therefore people need to choose their partners wisely. This can be more readily accomplished by committing to taking charge of one's self as opposed to allowing others' thoughts and beliefs, to take charge. Focus on developing a realistic sense of who you are as a person, being aware of your core values, needs and wants. To the extent that people are open to new ideas and new concepts about themselves, to that extent they will personally and relationally grow. It's important to have the courage to challenge the irrational thoughts that are limiting and the behavior that is ineffective.

Kindly reflect on the following questions and your responses to them. Your responses can act as building blocks toward positive personal growth and a more satisfying relationship.

1.) To what extent am I in charge of the way I want to live?

2.) To what extent do other peoples influence how I feel about myself?

3.) To what extent am I in charge of myself in my relationship and to what extent is my partner in charge of me?

4.) How would I describe my ideal self that I would like to be?

5.) In what areas do I already have these ideal traits?

6.) In what areas do I need focus on in order to be in charge of myself?

7.) How can being in charge of myself enhance my relationship?

In reflecting on how balancing the relationship between personal growth and interpersonal development can strengthen the likelihood of taking charge of one's life, kindly refer to the additional building blocks from A to Z.

A. Each person needs to take personal responsibility for change in order to hope to see changes in the relationship.

B. When one person presses the emotional buttons of the other in a relationship, then that is an opportunity for personal examination and potential growth.

C. If one person changes in a relationship, then the other person will likewise change in reaction to that change.

D. Change takes place when you take charge of yourself rather than making other people in charge of you.

E. Each person in the relationship needs to realize that ongoing unresolved conflict is only a defense to hide what's really going on, on a deeper level.

F. Relationships where both people feel validated, heard and understood stand the best chances of success.

G. Relationships where there is constant criticism, complaining and putdowns are those where the needs of one or both are not being met.

H. Changing your self talk can change your life.

I. For relationships to stand the best chance of working, each person needs to begin by looking at areas that need personal change within oneself.

J. People in the early stages of a relationship are exposed to all the warning signs but choose to ignore them in hopes that the other person will change.

K. People need not meet the perfect man or woman but the relationship can work if they validate and are supportive of one another.

L. In order for a relationship to be successful there needs to be attention paid to taking care of the little things.

M. Besides focusing on what the partner does wrong, try recognizing and acknowledging what the partner does right.

N. In a relationship, before criticizing, attempt to weigh it against what is done right by the other person in order to see a balanced picture.

O. Be aware of patterns that get replayed with your partner that originate from issues not worked through in early childhood.

P. In order for relationship to be successful each person needs to be both independent of and interdependent with the partner.

Q. Be aware that putting the other person down may be more reflective of insecurities on your part rather than those of your partner.

R. It's not the situation you are in that defines who you are but rather how you react to that situation.

S. Change, in order to have the greatest chance of lasting, needs to come in small steps rather than in one fell swoop.

T. Looking to the other for one's fulfillment and happiness, gives that person power over you and keeps you from taking charge of your own life.

U. Be able to discern what you can control and perfect that rather than wasting energy on what you can't control.

V. Give clear messages to your partner as to your needs and wants and be open to negotiation.

W. Resolution to conflict is more apt to occur when the other person's views are seen as different rather than wrong.

X. Communication is less of talking and more listening to what is said implicitly as well as explicitly by the other person.

Y. When dealing with conflict, focus only on the one issue at hand, rather than bringing up other unresolved issues from the past.

Z. Establish your own goals in life based on your own expectations.

Final wrap up

In order to summarize the essence of this book, remember these ten points that are made throughout the chapters. They are as the follows.

1. How you think/feel about yourself affects the relationship you are in

2. The status of your relationship affects how you think about yourself.

3. Outside influences past or present, environmental or genetic, conscious or unconscious, all vie to be in charge of how you think, feel and react to life. Your ultimate goal is to be in charge of yourself and your own destiny.

4. Taking charge of yourself is a power you have within you. It is not something given you by another person but is something that you can inadvertently give away.

5. It is not any given situation that defines who you are but rather your reaction to it.

6. Taking personal responsibility to make changes in your life will give you the greatest chance at success.

7. Changes made in small increments stand the greatest chance of success in meeting your overall goal.

8. Act as if your goals have already been achieved and they will be. In other words, "Fake it until you make it".

9. Setbacks in life are to be expected and should be treated as opportunities to make proper adjustments and modifications toward achieving what you want.

10. Remember, practice, practice, practice.

Sounds overwhelming? It does not have to be. It is certainly less work overall than continuing to repeat the same dysfunctional patterns that end with the same results. As we got through this journey of life, remind yourself that we are all beings in process. As illustrated, it is not a smooth journey from A to Z. Remember that each and every relationship along the way can either have a positive or negative impact. This, in turn, can effect whether your relationship is successful or not. Whether these relationships become toxic or healing depends on the extent the reader believes he/she deserves a fulfilling life. This is an expedition, and as such, may require professional counseling to assist in staying on track, minimizing the pitfalls along the way. This book is all about TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR LIFE or SOMEONE ELSE WILL TAKE CHARGE OF IT for you. Taking charge of your life is ultimately your decision alone. Don't miss the opportunity to take on that responsibility for yourself. If you don't, someone else will take charge of your life for you. Good luck!

Bibliography

1. American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *DSM-IV-TR Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. *Fourth Edition, Text Revision,* Arlington, V: American Psychiatric Association,

2. Asher, Ramona M.(1992). *Women with Alcoholic Husbands: Ambivalence and the Trap of Codependency*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press

3. Beattie, Melody. (1986). *Codependent No More, How to stop Controlling Others and Start Controlling Yourself.* Center City MN: Hazelden

4. Beck, Aaron T. and Emery, Gary. (1985). *Anxiety Disorders and Phobias, A Cognitive Perspective*. New York: Basic Books

5. Becker, Joseph and Kleinman, Arthur. (1991). Psychosocial Aspects *of Depression*. Hilldale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

6. Bennett, Joel B. (2000). *Time and Intimacy: A New Science of Personal Relationships*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

7. Berglas, Steven, and Roy F. Baumeister. (1993). *Your Own Worst Enemy: Understanding the Paradox of Self-Defeating Behavior.* New York: Basic Books.

8. Booth, Alan, and Ann C. Crouter. (2001). *Does It Take a Village? Community Effects on Children, Adolescents, and Families.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

9. Braiker, Harriet B. (1976). *The Disease to Please: Curing the people pleasing Syndrome*. New York: McGraw Hill.

10. Burr, Vivien. (2003). *Social Constructionism*. New York, NY: Routledge.

11. Cahn, Dudley D. (1994). *Conflict in Personal Relationships*. Hillsdale NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

12. Carnegie, Dale (2010). *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

13. Christian, Kenneth W. (2004). *Your own Worst Enemy: Breaking the Habit of Adult Underachievement.* , New York, NY: Harper Collins, Regan Books

14. Covey, Steven R. (2004). *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. New York, NY: Free Press.

15. Damasio, Antonio (2010). *Self Comes to Mind.* New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

16. Ellis, Albert (2011). *Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy.* Itasca, IL: F.E. Peacock.

17. Engel, Beverly. (2002). *The Emotionally Abusive Relationship.* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

18. Erber, Ralph, and Robin Gilmour. (1994). *Theoretical Frameworks for Personal Relationships*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

19. Farrell, Warren (1988). *Why Men Are The Way They Are"* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Books

20. Fein, Melvin L. (1993). *I.A.M.: A Common Sense Guide to Coping with Anger*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

21. Feindler, Eva L. (2006). *Anger Related Disorders: A Practitioner's Guide to Comparative Treatments*. New York: Springer.

22. Fincham, Frank D., and Beach, Steven, R.H. (1999). *Conflict in Marriage: Implications for Working With Couples.* Annual Review of Psychology, journal article.

23. Fisher, Erik A. (2004). *The Art of Managing Everyday Conflict: Understanding Emotions and Power Struggles*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

24. Flanagan, Catherine M. (1990). *People and Change: An Introduction to Counseling and Stress Management*. Hillside, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

25. Galician, Mary-Lou. (2004). *Sex, Love & Romance in the Mass Media: Analysis & Criticism of Unrealistic Portrayals & Their Influence*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 128-219.

26. Gimbutas, Marija. (Reprinted 2007). *The Gods and Godesses of Old Europe 6500-3500BC*. California: California Press.

27. Hatfield, Elaine, and Susan Sprecher. (1986). *Mirror, Mirror: The Importance of Looks in Everyday Life*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

28. Hendrix, Harville, (2008). *Getting the Love You Want.* New York, NY: Henry Holt & Company.

29. James, Adrian & Wilson, Kate. (1986). *Couples, Conflict and Change.* New York, NY:
Tavistock Publications

30. Johnson, Ernest H. (2000). *The Deadly Emotions: The Role of Anger, Hostility, and Aggression in Health and Emotional Well-Being*. New York: Praeger.

31. Jongeward, Dorothy, and Dru Scott. (1976). *Women as Winners: Transactional Analysis for Personal Growth*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

32. Kalbfleisch, Pamela J. (1993). *Interpersonal Communication Evolving Interpersonal Relationships*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

33. Kalbfleisch, Pamela J. (1995) and Michael J. Cody, eds. *Gender, Power, and Communication in Human Relationships.* Hillsdale NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

34. King James Version. (1999). *The Holy Bible*. American Bible Society.

35. Lamar, Donna F. (2010). *Marie did it, so can I: How I Survive, Heal and Transcend Abuse and Neglect.* New York: Plenum Press.

36. Lerner, Harriet G. (1999). *The Dance of Intimacy: A Woman's Guide to Courageous Change in Key Relationships*. New York: Harper & Row.

37. Martin, Leonard L., and Abraham Tesser. (1996). *Striving and Feeling: Interactions among Goals, Affect, and Self-Regulation*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

38. McKay Matthew, Davis, Partha and Fanning, Patrick. (2003). *Thoughts and Feelings: Taking Control of Your Moods and Life*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.

39. McMullin, Rian. (2000) *The New Handbook of Cognitive Therapy Techniques.* New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co.

40. McQuade, Walter and Aikman, Ann. (1974), *Stress.* New York, NY: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc.

41. Monet,Alan & Lazarus, Richard. (1977). *Stress and Coping: An Anthology.* New York, NY.

    Columbia University Press.

42. Pelusi, Nando. (January/February, 2009). *The Appeal of the Bad Boy*. Article in <u>Psychology Today</u>,

43. Plomin, Robert, McClearn, Gerald. (1993) *Nature, Nurture and Psychology.* Washinton D.C.:

    American Psychological Association.

44. Prochoska, James, Norcross, John & Diclemente, Carlo. (1994). *Changing for Good.* New York,

    NY. William Morrow & Company, Inc.

45. Reiser, Christa. (2001). *Reflections on Anger: Women and Men in a Changing Society*. Wesport,

    CT: Praeger Publishers.

46. Roth, Linda S. RN, MSN, NP. (2009). *Mosby's Nursing Drug Reference.* St. MO: Mosby, Inc.,

    an affiliate of Elsevier, Inc.

47. Schaeffer, Brenda. (1987). I*s it Love or Is it Addiction?* New York, NY: MJF Books.

48. Schwartz, Richard Stanton, and Jacqueline Olds. (2000). *Marriage in Motion: The Natural Ebb and

    Flow of Lasting Relationships*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishers.

49. Thompson, Rosemary A. (2003). *Counseling Techniques: Improving Relationships with Others,

    Ourselves, Our Families, and Our Environment*. New York: Brunner-Routledge Publishers.

50. Vangelisti, Anita L., Harry T. Reis, and Mary Anne Fitzpatrick. (2002). *Stability and Change in

    Relationships*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

51 Weeks, Gerald R. and Treat, Steven R. (2001). *Couples in Treatment: Techniques and Approaches

    for Effective Practice*. Philadelphia, PA: Brunner- Routledge Publishers.

52. Weisinger, Hendrie. (1985). *Anger Work Out Book.* NewYork, NY. William Morrow & Company

APPENDIX

ANTI-ANXIETY MEDICATIONS

Lorazepam/ <u>Brand name</u>: *Ativan-*Treats anxiety, anxiety with depression and insomnia (trouble sleeping) This medicine is a benzodiazepine.

Buspirone/ <u>Brand name</u>: *Buspar-* Treats anxiety

Clonazepam/ <u>Brand name</u>: *Klonopin* –Treats seizures, panic disorder and anxiety. This medicine is a benzodiazepine.

Fluvoxamine/ <u>Brand name</u>: *Luvox CR-* Treats symptoms of obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and social anxiety (social phobias).

Diazepam/ <u>Brand name</u>: *Valium-* Treats anxiety, muscle spasms, seizures and other medical conditions. This medicine is a benzodiazepine.

Hydroxyzine Pamoate/ <u>Brand name</u>: *Vistaril-* Treats anxiety, nervousness, nausea, vomiting, allergies, skin rash, hives and itching. This medicine is an antihistamine.

Alprazolam/ <u>Brand name</u>: *Xanax-* Treats anxiety, panic disorder, insomnia (trouble sleeping) and anxiety caused by depression. This medicine is a benzodiazepine.

ANTI-DEPRESSION MEDICATIONS

Citalopram/ <u>Brand name</u>; *Celexa-* Treats depression. This medicine is an antidepressant called a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI)

Duloxetine/ <u>Brand name</u>: *Cymbalta-* Treats depression, generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), nerve pain caused by diabetes, or fibromyalgia (muscle pain and stiffness).

This medicine is a selective serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor (SSNRI)

Veniafaxine/ <u>Brand name</u>; *Effexor-* Treats depression, panic disorder, social anxiety disorder and generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). This medicine is a serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor (SNRI).

Escitalopram/ <u>Brand Name</u>: *Lexapro-*Treats severe depression and generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). This medicine is an effective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI).

Paroxetine/ <u>Brand name</u>: *Paxil CR-* Treats depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), premenstrual dysphoric (PHDD), general anxiety disorder (GAD), and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This medicine is selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI).

Fluoxetine/ <u>Brand name</u>: *Prozac-* Treats depression, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), eating disorders, and panic disorder. This medicine is a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI).

Mirtazapine/ <u>Brand name</u>: *Remeron-* Treats depression.

Trazodone/ <u>Brand name</u>: *Desyrel Dividose-* Treats depression and depression with anxiety.

Bupropion/ <u>Brand name</u>: *Wellbutrin-* Treats depression and aids in quitting smoking. Also prevents depression caused by seasonal affective disorder.
This medicine is an antidepressant.

Sertraline/ <u>Brand name</u>: *Zoloft-* Treats depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), social anxiety (SAD) and panic disorder. This medicine is an antidepressant called a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI).

Be sure to report to the doctor any side effect to the medication prescribed, any allergic reactions to certain medications, any physical problems, possible current pregnancy and information as to other medications being taken. The doctor should tell you how much of the medication to be taken and how often. Medication is not to be taken more often than the doctor prescribes. Be sure to consult with the doctor or pharmacist before using any other medicines, including over-the-counter medicines, vitamins and herbal products.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONAIRES

The following twenty statements were developed in order for you to reflect upon and evaluate where you are in reference to a relationship. After each question, circle either "A" for Agree, "D" for Disagree, or "U" for Uncertain. These questions are meant to start you thinking about underlying needs and issues that will need to be addressed in order for a relationship to flourish. Take a few minutes to respond to the statements and then reflect on those responses. This new awareness can provide opportunities to address potential problem areas that might otherwise be ignored or allowed to fester.

1. *Sometimes I feel that my partner's needs supersede my own. A D U*
2. *The behavior of my partner at times makes me feel uncomfortable. A D U*
3. *My partner's use of drugs and/or alcohol is of concern to me. A D U*
4. *My family and friends approve of my partner. A D U*
5. *Sometimes I think my partner tries to control me. A D U*
6. *My partner has issues that concern me, but things will work out naturally. A D U*
7. *I rarely think about or consider my needs in the relationship. A D U*
8. *I feel I can express myself to my partner and feel heard. A D U*
9. *I feel my partner acts inappropriately when he/she drinks. A D U*
10. *My partner's moodiness puts strain on our relationship. A D U*
11. *My partner always has to win in a disagreement between us. A D U*
12. *When we disagree, we stick with the issue rather than bringing up the past. A D U*
13. *I am uncomfortable at times with the way my partner expresses his/her feelings. A D U*
14. *I have problems trusting my partner. A D U*
15. *We argue about the same thing over and over without resolution. A D U*
16. *There are qualities about my partner that I am uncomfortable with. A D U*
17. *I hold things in hoping to avoid conflict. A D U*
18. *I find my partner controlling at times. A D U*
19. *At times, I feel manipulated by guilt instilled by my partner. A D U*
20. *We have broken up many times in our relationship. A D U*

After completing this questionnaire, go over each of the answers. Have they been answered honestly? If so, are there areas of concern? Are there areas that you feel good about? Take out a blank sheet of paper and write these down. Be honest and try not to minimize or maximize anything. Answers circled "Uncertain" need to be examined as to the reasons for the uncertainty. Are there areas of concern that need to be addressed if the relationship is to be long lasting? At this point, how do you want to proceed? Does the new awareness that has come out of this exercise necessitate changes in your partner, yourself, or both? Regardless of your choice, be aware that personal responsibility for change is an important ingredient in the success of any relationship. Remember that change is always possible within the context of a relationship or separate from it.

In order to assist in the process getting the most productive resolution from areas of conflict, the reader is asked to read the following statements. Respond to each statement with and "Agree, Disagree or Uncertain" (A, D or U) by circling the ones the most apply to you.

1.) *Our conflicts are over the same old issues that don't seem to get resolved. A D U*
2.) *I believe that nothing good can come from conflict. A D U*
3.) *When I do bring up an issue with my partner, he/she counters with another issue and we go back and forth with nothing being resolved. A D U*
4.) *I am hesitant to bring up any issue because my partner becomes argumentative. A D U*

5.) I don't feel heard when I bring up a conflict. A D U

6.) I believe a good dragged fight is good once in a while in order to clear the air. Y N U

7.) When there is a conflict, my partner always has to be right. A D U

8.) I handle conflict like one or both of my parents did. A D U

9.) My partner handles conflict like his/her parent(s) did. A D U

10.) It's hard for me to listen to what my partner is saying during a conflict without thinking of my rebuttal. A D U

11.) When there is a conflict, I feel put down by my partner. A D U

12.) I don't feel I can do anything right in the eyes of my partner. A D U

In going through these questions closely examine on a separate sheet of paper any insight derived from the questions. As before, any questions responded as "Uncertain" may need further exploration that would shed light on reasons for the uncertainly and what needs to be done to make the responses specifically an "Agree" or "Disagree"

Take Charge of your Life or Someone Else Will
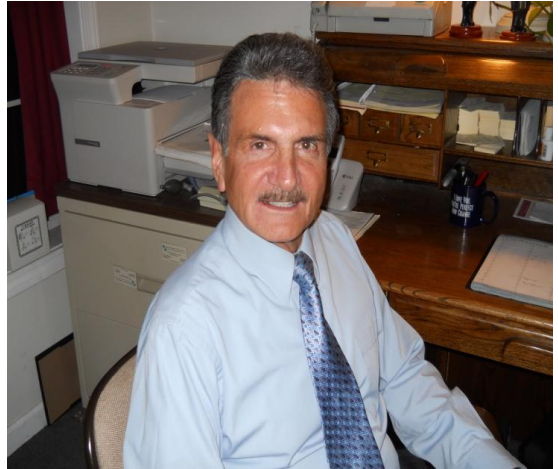
Raymond Shocki, PhD, LMFT, LCSW is the founding director of the Life Source Center, a not for profit corporation, dealing with a wide spectrum of human behavior. Doctor Shocki brings over thirty years professional experience in the field of behavioral health.

In his book, Dr. Shocki takes the reader through the dynamics of the interplay between how the person's self concept affects the nature of his or hers close relationships and how those close relationships can also affect the self concept of the person.

This book is meant to be a guide for anyone who was injured in a relationship or wants to find ways to maneuver through the maze of ambiguities in life. It outlines the sources of the stumbling blocks, recognizing fruitless coping mechanisms and obtaining the necessary strategies to effectively deal with life and its stressors. This book will also prepare you to get the most out of your current or future relationship.

"Take Charge of Your Life or Someone Else Will" aims to help prevent common mistakes made in various relationships that create more damage. It was written by a behavioral health psychologist who wanted to make it easier for readers to understand how to take charge of their lives rather than allowing life to take charge of them.