

Co-Creating the Relationship You Want

Breaking the Chains of the Past



THE COUPLE'S JOURNEY©

Effective guidance for a troubled relationship is not just a matter of working through conflicts and problems in the relationship. It is a matter of achieving some perspective on the relationship as a whole, by addressing questions such as:

- What is happening in the relationship?
- What were the significant factors that brought you into this relationship?
- What do you want to be moving towards? What would be more ideal?
- What needs to happen in order to bridge the gap between where you are now toward would be more ideal?
- What within each partner is in the way of doing what it takes to bridge that gap?

During the romantic phase of a relationship, the usual experience is “When I am with you, I feel whole.” (Fig. 1, A below.) Something feels more complete – like coming home to one’s self. This happens because, below the surface of conscious awareness, there are parts of each partner (feelings, thoughts, hopes, dreams – suppressed or hidden during formative years) that somehow feel recognized, accepted, or comforted by the other partner. This is a powerful, though mostly unspoken, attraction. (Fig. 1, B and B1.) “*He is my strength.*” “*She is my comfort.*” While the diagram and discussion here are admittedly both stereotyped and over-simplified, most couples experience these as helpful guidelines.

In addition, there is another even more powerful unconscious attraction—one wounded inner child recognizing and sympathizing with the wounded inner child of the partner. (Fig. 1, C). These are often referred to as the *Invisible Partners*.¹ They are present in every relationship and in each person’s search for individual wholeness. This results in a very tight bonding—an unspoken, unconscious (and therefore more powerful) contract: This is a quite natural thing for two children (or adolescents) to do since, as children they cannot meet their own needs nor those of each other; however, it does not work well in adult relationships! Relationships founded exclusively on this “being in love” state, vs. truly loving each other, can never last, because this is the illusion of wholeness, the result of projection of both positive and negative traits – but there is good news!

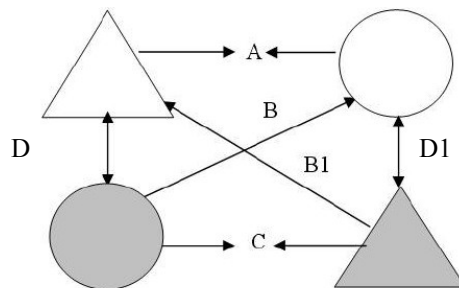


Figure 1: Romantic phase of relationship – “being in love”.

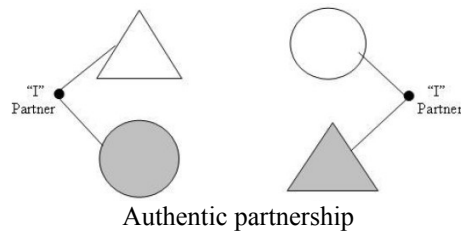
As time goes on, each partner begins to feel constrained by the expectation (conscious or unconscious) that it’s up to them to fulfill the needs of their partner’s wounded child. This point of dissatisfaction offers great opportunity because it gives rise to an even more fundamental force at work within each partner - that of reuniting with suppressed or repressed parts of themselves, the reclaiming of their own capacity to be and express their own authentic being, to live out their hopes and dreams. (Fig. 1, D and D1.)

“We fall in love not just because we have matching values and goals, but because we have matching junk! It’s God’s carrot!”

~ Patricia Sun, spiritual teacher.

To the degree that partners successfully identify and establish an empathic connection to their own inner child/adolescentⁱⁱ, they are able to choose freely an adult-to-adult way of relating to each other versus dependency-oriented relationships. What emerges is a deeper, more expanded way of truly loving each other in a way that honors both the individuality and belonging needs of each partner. “I can be *who I am* and still be in a satisfying relationship. “I *can be in a satisfying relationship* and still be who I am.” As each partner takes responsibility for his/her own wounding and coping style – i.e. respond to the needs of their own wounded selves (*survival personalities*ⁱⁱⁱ), then they can relate “I” to I”, “Partner to Partner”.

To this end, in my opinion, it is best that each partner do his/her own individual work. There is some controversy about how this should be approached. Some believe that each partner should have their own therapist and seek out a third therapist for their work together as a couple. My personal opinion is that this is expensive, time consuming and there is no one holding the big picture – no unifying center. So long as the chosen therapist is one who is capable of working in the best interest of each partner, (i.e. without aligning with one or the other), I believe the latter choice is far more efficient, effective and more desirable.



As each partner achieves the ability to respond to their own wounded selves, something “magical” happens! Gradually, partners find that they are no longer overpowered by the intensity of emotions from current problems between them, which were formerly amplified by their unresolved survival issues from past experience (symbolized by the shaded triangle and circle in the figure above). The problems are no longer seen as survival issues, but rather issues of desire and preference. Partners are able to approach their current problems from clearer perspective.

Authentic love begins only when partners come to know each other for *who they really are* as human beings, take back their projections and support each other in becoming whole.

*“Love is not two people staring into each other’s eyes.
Love is two people looking together in the same direction.”
~ The Little Prince, Antoine de Saint Exupéry*

ⁱ Invisible Partners, John Sanford.

ⁱⁱ *Breaking the Chains of the Past*, Therese Caveney, pp. 29-42.

ⁱⁱⁱ "...inner child is not one "ego state" or **subpersonality** (Assagioli, 1965) among others, but the true "heart" or "core" of the personality, having a fundamental impact on one's life as a whole. It follows from this that the wounding of inner child by abuse and neglect, for example, is something which also affects one's life as a whole; here trauma is not limited to one aspect of the personality, but damages the very heart of the personality. Such wounding causes a global shift from authentic, spontaneous expression of self—authentic personality—towards a compensating, defensive focus on survival in an unhealthy environment, forming over time what we have called **survival personality** (Op. cit.). So inner child, whether healthy or wounded, profoundly affects the overall expression of ourselves in the world. *Opening to the Inner Child*, John Firman & Ann Gila – free download from www.psychoanalysispaloalto.com.