

Robinsons on Parallel Envy in an Intimate Relationship

Two giants of teaching and therapy, Doctors Rachel Shifron and Betty Lou Bettner, joined forces to teach the participants at the Adlerian Summer Institute in Switzerland in the summer of 2011. Rachel Shifron, Ph. D., teaches at the Adler Institute in Israel and practices psychotherapy, using Early Recollections (ER's) among other tools in her own unique way. Betty Lou Bettner, Ph. D., teaches at the Holy Family University in Philadelphia, PA. and has authored a number of books for teachers and parents. Rachel's and Betty's students always want more and more from them year after year. Their topic was envy and its influence on a couple's partnership.

In an intimate relationship these characteristics must be given and received by both partners to achieve a lasting relationship:

- Belonging
- Improvement
- Significance
- Courage

Only a courageous person can experience real love. Of all relationships: family, friends, work, colleagues, and intimacy, intimacy is the most difficult. Intimacy begins, of course, with the right choice of a partner, one with social interest. How we choose a mate is a test of our marriage.

All mistakes in our intimate relationships are related to our life styles. Cooperation is over when the fight begins. The difficulty in intimate (and other) relationships is in establishing equality in those relationships. The two extremes the therapists see most often are power and submission. It seems impossible for couples to establish equality in a relationship.

In our early years, we observe, draw conclusions, and find a way to find significance. Every human being strives for significance.

“Whole significance is contribution to the lives of others.”

Remembering that it is **not what we can get out of life but what we can give to life** will serve us well as we move toward satisfying relationships.

It is very interesting that only human beings make comparisons:

- Classrooms
- Art, drama
- Between lovers
- Among nations
- Families

Unhealthy comparison leads to jealousy and envy: “ I wish to have what you have.” Or “We are ready to destroy you when we don’t have what you have.” There is a symptom of an insidious disease, which is highly prevalent in our culture. This disease is persisting infantilism. For the purposes of this discussion, this disease is known as **envy**.

Envy can destroy all of the needs in a relationship. All problems are problems of human cooperation. We as humans all wish to overcome difficulties. Adlerians call this **moving from a felt minus to a felt plus**.

Some consider themselves second-class citizens and blame others for their discomfort. In 1971, respected Adlerian authors, the Beechers offered this: “No one is every destroyed by another person. A jealous individual or any disturbed individual is destroyed only from inside himself,” (or herself).

Rachel Shifron described some incidents from the Old Testament of this infectious virus of envy: Cain killed Abel over envy. Jacob cheated in order to receive his fathers' blessing (in a very creative way to get what he was after.) Joseph, Saul, David striving for power positions.

Parents often accept rivalry as acceptable that will be outgrown. It is important to remember to maintain boundaries—rivalry can become like an “infectious virus.” It can be spread by ignorance and contamination. Children who are raised without boundaries become envious adults—sometimes excessively envious. Then as adults they become a challenge in a couple's relationship.

In therapy, a therapist will work with Early Recollections to discover with clients the strengths and abilities that they are not aware of—and thus are enabled to actualize their talents. Envy may lead to hate even death situations. Rather it may be incorrect training in social interest—thinking that fighting when envious is the way to relate to others.

Therapists create a safe environment. All couples who seek help want to have a healthy relationship. Just as there are no troubled children, but children who are in trouble. Also, there are no troubled couples but only couples in trouble. Envy is basic to all character disorders (acting as a dependent—non responsible person.)

In volatile family relationships, a body may feel if I'm not aggressive, others will take advantage of me. Alfred Adler had a thought about this as quoted by Ansbacher in 1956. **“No act of cruelty has ever been done which has not been based on weakness.”**

As a first step in therapy, Dr. Shifron points out; a partner's creative methods to protect his/her own self-esteem can use the

same creativity to take care of their partner. This is how social interest can be demonstrated in a couple.

Rudolf Dreikurs, M. D., in his book The Challenge of Marriage (1946) had this to say, “**A little smile, a kind expression of patience, a kiss full of tenderness and a word of sincere affection may work wonders.**”

The basic requirements needed in a health relationship are expressed in Dr. Bettner’s CRUCIAL C’s

- | | |
|---------|----------------------------------|
| Connect | Feeling of Belonging |
| Capable | Feeling of Improving |
| Count | Feeling that I have significance |
| Courage | Feeling that I am encouraged |

Each partner wants a strong sense of connection and belonging in the relationship. Each wants the partner to recognize the strengths and skills we bring to the relationship. Each wants the partner to do something to acknowledge strengths and abilities.

Important in intimate relationships is for each partner to assume the responsibility for the care of each other in loving ways. The meaning of marital happiness is the feeling the partner needs you as a fellow and a true friend who cannot be replaced. Appreciation is one of the most vital elements of encouragement.

In therapy the most important step is to point out strengths, creative skills, resourcefulness and the basic strategies that each partner uses to achieve goals. The therapist works to discover the hidden abilities to focus on the other’s needs. Each partner works

on learning the other's sensitivity. The solutions are within the partners themselves.

In the therapy, the counselor has the partner write the strengths that the counselor points out. Then the counselor asks the partner: "Can you see these strengths in your relationship?" "Can you give an example?"

Finally, happiness in a relationship comes from the creative ways couples learn and demonstrate how to help each other:

Each supporting the other in personal goals

Each benefiting from the relationship

Each committing to encourage the partner every single day

For therapist, partners, parents, and students this lecture was useful on many levels. All were in rapt attention as the dynamic duo teamed up to teach and inspire.