A black and white photograph of an elderly man and woman. The man is on the left, wearing a checkered shirt, and the woman is on the right, wearing glasses and a dark top. They are both smiling and hugging each other. The background is dark and out of focus.

Stronger Relationships

Workbook

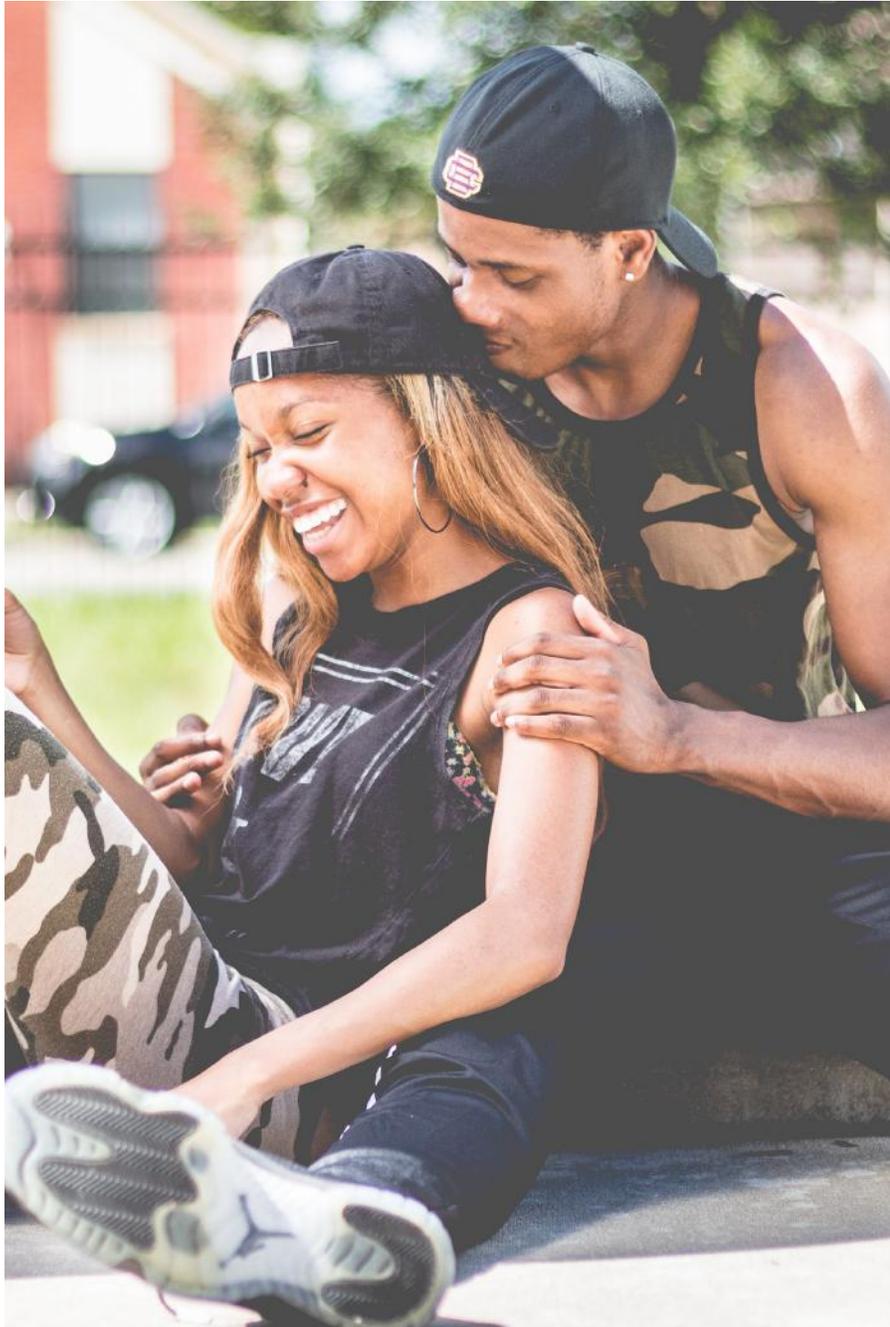
"The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed"

C.G. Jung

Nude-Thinking Counseling

contents

workbook



INTRODUCTION

1. EVERY INTERACTION IS A RELATIONSHIP

Let us start this journey with a reality check

2. BASIC HUMAN NEEDS

We are driven by our needs and that makes them key to our relationships

3. EXPECTATIONS

How does what we expect influence how we show up

4. EVEN MORE EXPECTATIONS

We are not quite done yet...

5. COMMUNICATION

So how do we express all that we have now learned of ourselves?

6. THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIP

Even more expectations

Privacy

Different relationships will have different privacy requirements for you. But even then there is no standard to work from here. For some friends it is perfectly fine to share a shower or go to the sauna together, and for other friends you may have a greater need for privacy. Some people don't mind visitors dropping by unannounced, and you might be quite the opposite. How much contact is acceptable to you, what subjects are too personal, these are all privacy related questions.

Understanding the boundaries of the person you are in a relationship with allows you to be respectful and also decide if these are acceptable to you. If you feel like their privacy needs create a distance or a freedom that makes you uncomfortable and you have not managed to come to an acceptable compromise together then you can make an informed choice.

Something that always strikes me is how much judgement comes up when some of these privacy needs are expressed. Requiring your own office space to work from at home is generally accepted, but wanting your own bedroom is frowned upon in a marriage. A modern day need is often found around devices; do you check each others phones or are those considered private? Are you allowed your secrets, your very private thoughts, is between you two.

Are all your friends also each others friends? Does your partner know all of them? How much room is there for you to have one-on-one time with the people in your life? And that includes the privacy of not having to report on everything that was discussed or done. It requires trust and an adult honesty when the rules of the relationship have been broken. But having this freedom does allow more space for growth and fulfillment of your core needs.

Intimacy

This words freaks some people out as for them there is no version of it that is not sexualised. But I beg you to look at intimacy as this deep, loving, spiritual and energetic connection. This may sound a bit 'heavy' and will create new freakers, but simply calling it a connection doesn't quite feel the same to me.

We all expect some degree of intimacy. Without it, it often gets harder to engage.

We can be intimately involved with other people, with our community, your house/environment, with nature and your faith.

Even more expectations

Inter-human intimacy has different aspects. When we experience social intimacy we are often carried by this feeling of belonging and same-spiritedness. An accessible example of that would be team sports. When it clicks then you can see this group of people moving and performing as one organism, completely connected by something beyond their physical form. We as spectators are also drawn into a social bonding experience where we are friends and comrades for that amazing moment when our team is magical.

Physical intimacy is much more than sharing sexual touch. Remember the last time you were on public transport where someone stood just that bit too close to you? It was an intimacy that probably felt uncomfortable, threatening, invasive or its opposite where it felt supportive, exciting, naughty. But it was this physical closeness that created an intimacy that you had a response to. Many jobs, like masseurs, doctors, hairdressers, deal with the thin line between too much or too little intimacy. If someone touches your body without any engagement it can feel just as uncomfortable as when there is too much of it. Physical intimacy is very dependent on consent. Which is something that we are not very trained in. How often do you check what is comfortable for someone before you touch them? A shoulder pat could be very misconstrued regardless of your intention, simply because consent was not established. So train yourself in this, start asking permission.

Inter-human intimacy can also be felt at a mental and spiritual level. When you have a conversation with someone that was so amazing that for that time you were talking you just loved them deeply. Hung on their words. You felt understood, challenged, inspired and we attribute that to the other person usually rather than the intimacy that was allowed to show up in our connection in that moment. The connection can also be spiritual. I always experience this during the relaxation/meditation phase of a yoga class. The energy that we share is deeply silent and connected. It is all inclusive and soft and loving. The intimacy we share is not through interaction, but through sharing space.

My partner always relaxes deeply when he is in my apartment. I take that as a compliment, but it wasn't until we had a conversation about it that I truly understood what triggered this feeling for him. My home is my temple. This is where I keep my memory treasures, where I retreat into myself, it is my place of sensual and erotic pleasure, and I take care of it with my whole being. Ok ok I could be a better cleaner, but that is not what I am talking about. Caring deeply for a space will show. It is an expression of you. And my partner loves to land in that familiar, cared-for space.

Even more expectations

Nature and its creatures will often create an effect of recognition on people. Suddenly the concept of intimacy is understood, no words needed. There might be different triggers, a horse or cat for some, the forest, a beach, open water, a garden. It seems to be build into our DNA to relate to nature on a much more loving level. Are you sniggering now that we are also the most damaging to nature? Yes, we are. It is our paradox. How much do we allow progress and modern live to use the resources that the planet needs and that we ourselves are made of as well? This is a parallel you will also find in many relationships. How much of your energy & attention will you give to the other and where do you start setting your boundaries. But I digress.

When it comes to intimacy it is in nature that we will more easily find our expectations being met rather than in human encounters. There is no demand for reciprocity, just pure experience. Perhaps that is a wise lesson.

To experience intimacy in your life you need to be willing to be open, vulnerable, leave room for the other, to trust, to pay attention and notice, to surrender to it. Let's work with that.

Exercise 8

In case you did not read up about me, this is maybe new, I am a tantrika. In other words: I study and practice the art of tantra. In telling you this I fear you may now think “oh yeah, that is all about sex” and forget what I just said about intimacy and it being broader than sexual intimacy. Tantra is like yoga, a way of life. And it brings some really easy exercises we could do here to experiment with intimacy and being open to it. So please watch the video now and get started!

Role of others

Earlier on I spoke of your blueprint. One of the things that tends to be imprinted as well are your expectations of in- and exclusivity.

Do you have a great desire to have a 'best' friend or are you more of the group kind? In work and sports too you can have a preference as far as how many people get involved and you interact with.

Do you allow special time and space for the family, teachers, partners or are they all on the same emotional engagement level for you?

Your blueprint and the pre-defined roles you have created for the people in your live can carry a great deal of structure (this may or may not apply to you, remember no judgement here) which will decide how close you will allow that person to be to you. Like an organisational chart, the further down the line, the less they need to be involved and included. And this is not because you don't like them! As a matter of fact, it has very little to do with that individual, but with the relationship you have with them and where you have places that on the chart.

Even more expectations

It is interesting to discover for yourself what happens to the intimacy, the time and attention you allow others when a romantic partner shows up in your life. You will be likely to get many of your needs fulfilled in the romantic relationship. Or you will be expecting that from this partner and demanding it there rather than searching for it elsewhere.

Another question is whether you prioritize. Are you capable of deciding which relationship you are willing and able to focus on? Do you respond to the needs of the relationship or the other persons demands? And what if you find yourself not in a position where you can or want to engage, do you share this, do you break the unspoken rule of good behaviour and speak out? The other person might surprise you. Perhaps they are unaware of their pattern, or happy to give you the space you need. When did you last break up with a friend? We rarely do. We avoid, make excuses, sit through endless evenings against our will. Ugh, why? Surely neither one of you is satisfied this way. Why bother? Breaking up is actually a more loving and respectful way of letting go. It brings clarity and keeps the good memories untainted.

Another way to prioritize is to set some boundaries for the relationship. To openly have this discussion and explain what it is that you need and are willing to give. It is a scary thing, as we are not very accustomed to it. Not with friends, family or colleagues. This is a conversation we strangely reserve for romantic relationships. And it works, so why not apply the knowledge to your other relationships?

Now lets talk a little about love. What believes do you hold around love and how much of it is allowed in your relationships. Do you believe that love differs from relationship to relationship? I don't. Love is love, in my experience. The reasons why I love can change, the expression of that love will too, the intensity of the experience of love (back to intimacy) may be different, but I don't know how to feel 50 shades of love. You may disagree with me here, please do! And do contact me to explain your love-story!

Exercise 9

So here you are... you are fabulous colleagues, inspire each other, get shit done, have fun together, get along, speak the same language, support each other. And you start feeling closer to this person. You share more personal information, you go and have a drink, share a hug. The level of intimacy is clearly shifting. When do you move them into another box? Are there combined boxes or do they occupy 2 now?

- What are your criteria for the roles of people and how do you move them around your board to align with the feelings and closeness?
- What are your needs regarding the roles?
- How do you decide who gets you attention?
- What fluidity do you feel regarding the roles of others in your life?

Even more expectations

Monogamy

When we discuss romantic relationships many of us will assume that this is a heterosexual, monogamous relationship between two people of the same race and same background (incl religion).

Having a different cultural and religious backgrounds may indeed impact on the beliefs around and sanctity of monogamy. The rest of it may offer its challenges, but will be less directly connected to monogamy.

In many romantic relationships monogamy, meaning sexual exclusivity, is assumed. And since we are in these relationships for romantic (love) reasons*, it is a threat to our emotional well-being when it turns out that the unspoken fidelity rule is broken. But why don't we have this discussion when we get together? And I don't mean that you share your point of view and leave no room for conversation and exploration of the subject. And while you are at it, you may also want to create a definition of monogamy that is clear to both of you. Does it only include sex? And what constitutes sex? What about emotional intimacy with others? Sharing why these things are important to you will deepen your understanding of each others needs in the relationship.

If the relationship becomes long term, you both grow as people, your relationship will change and develop, and your point of view or needs around monogamy may shift. Check in with each other every few years to see if you are still on the same page.

One of my pet peeves is when the requirement of sexual exclusivity in a relationship is combined with a closed mind to understanding and exploring your partners sexual desires. What I mean by that is that your partner may have a desire to experience pleasure through pain, cross dress, do kinky stuff. When your relationship rules are that there will be sexual exclusivity it also brings the responsibility for you to be open to give your partner the room to at least speak of those feelings. Because if not with you then where does that leave your partner? What should (s)he do about those desires? These emotional restraints, the lack of freedom to express this side of themselves may be the exact reason why they end up straying. And that is not a threat, but a statistical reality. As humans we feel the need to be ourselves, to grow, explore, and express. You may be surprised at your partners willingness to compromise, if you meet them in open conversation without fear. And they will love you deeply for also seeing and allowing them to show this side of themselves.

In closing off this avenue you may also be limiting your own freedom for future desires. They may not be sexual but they can become a bargaining tool for the relationship (if you want this then I want that). And the solution here is not that you forget about your own boundaries, but that you keep the conversation open and find where there is flexibility and room. Putting something in a closed-off box will give it more power.

Even more expectations

Remember my statement from Chapter 1? We are all polyamorous. It is here in this monogamy discussion that we truly test how willing we are to accept the love that our partner feels for other people in their live. It is also why I encourage you to carry the conversation beyond sex. For love will happen, other people will play a big role in your life, this is the nature of humans. Even crushes and sexual attraction are going to show up. If you don't equip the relationship to deal with this by having an open space where these feelings can be shared with your partner, creates a tension, a growing ground for lies and secrets. All very hurtful when we find out rather then speak our truth in a respectful and loving manner.

Exercise 10

Take an hour for this video. It is really worth your time. I quoted (*) these speakers a few times in the above.

<https://youtu.be/s7E9ASb3LFE>

