

Why we attract the intimate partners we do



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Today we are in a new paradigm in how we approach intimate relationship. This expanded attitude includes moving away from victimisation, to taking responsibility for what consciously and unconsciously attracted us to our partner in the first place. It also calls for an understanding of what truly lies behind our shared joys and conflicts. We generally accept that we seek a partner with shared interests and who will complement us in our shortcomings. However, we are also guided by an unconscious agenda that carries a potential for extraordinary healing. **Cyntha Gonzalez** shares her insights on the sometimes baffling ways of the heart in this first part of a two feature series.

At the outset, our relationship to our parents and key caretakers, which can include older siblings, influences us deeply as we were completely vulnerable and dependent upon them. When we find ourselves in a committed relationship, the same feelings of the past are often triggered, even if rationally we are independent adults. Few of us arrive into adulthood unharmed by some degree of emotional wounding that in most cases emerges when we grow up with imperfect parents. We bring this 'unfinished business' to our relationship and our partner does exactly the same. Harville Hendrix, in *Getting the Love You Want*, elaborates on how we even seek out someone who will have not only some of the positive traits of our parents, but also the negative ones.

You may ask, "Why in the world would I unconsciously search for a partner that has the negative traits of my parents?" This is because we want to grow up that much. We want to finally be empowered, mature adults. We want to heal our blind reactivity. More deeply, we want to see our parents for the wounded children they really were, behind their threatening behaviours. We ultimately want to forgive them and be free of their influences that did not contribute

to a good self-esteem and belief in our worthiness of love. What a better way to achieve such a goal than to find a partner that has both the positive and negative traits of our caretakers and will serve as the perfect homeopathic remedy to set us on our way to healing this unfinished business once and for all.

For instance, if we grew up with a caretaker who was often angry, swore a lot and had all the family members walking on eggshells, we may choose a partner that has a bullying streak, a volatile temper and makes us feel unsafe. Initially, we most likely will go into reactive mode with this bully partner, picking up where we left off with our bully parent - treading so carefully so as not stir the sleeping dragon. Or we may dare to fight back, swear and protest in a way that we never would have risked to do as a child. At some point, this endless drama will feel despairingly unfulfilling. The real invitation is to see in our partner that vulnerable, hurt, insecure child behind such scary facades and learn to 'jump' his or her 'fence' and firmly and lovingly set limits while speaking to the insecurity and pain disguised beneath. As we do this, usually with a lot of trial and error, we will come to see that our parent or caretaker was as

equally wounded and helpless in the face of his or her own spasms of vulnerability.

Perhaps we grew up with a smothering, overprotective parent who did not let us discover the world or express ourselves, like our peers could do. Perhaps this parent was emotionally needy due to great abandonment in childhood and wanted us to make up for his or her deep loneliness and insecurity by overwhelming us. Perhaps this parent had a different value system and feared the disapproval of family, friends and community if we led our life as we so longed to do. We then may choose a partner that has the trait of being needy and wanting to spend all their time with us, not giving us space to have other friends and interests. Or we may find ourselves with a very controlling partner that disapproves of our hobbies or friends and uses emotional blackmail to coerce our behaviour. One day we may cross the line and verbally abuse our partner, "You are such a possessive, controlling, manipulative pain. Get a life. You're so needy!"

In a nutshell: Verbal abuse = Reactivity = Untreated Pain from the past. Most likely we were not able to express our anger and resentment at our needy parent for being more of a child than an adult, until lo and behold, our partner gives us the same emotional blackmail and we erupt. The solution is to set limits, let our partner feel their primal fear and take the risk to live life as we feel we need to. We will need to feel the anger and eventually compassion for our partner's insecure behaviour. We will need to stay true to ourselves, despite any guilt trips thrown at us. Keep in mind this is a desperate measure of our partner to avoid feeling scary, exposed pain.

CONSCIOUS RELATIONSHIP

The more we trust pain the more we will trust its eventual healing. As we become more empowered in dealing with our abusive or needy partner, we will set limits lovingly and firmly. Our delivery will be lucid and kind. We will appeal to the adult inside our partner instead of reinforcing the hurt, powerless child. We will then come to see our abusive or needy caretaker as a hurt child who needed those same firm yet loving limits when we were growing up, but realize there was no one back then to set them. We will forgive our caretaker as we come to such clear understanding of such dynamics, thanks to the tests of initiation with our love partner.

Whenever we find ourselves bickering and arguing, or engaging in worse abuse with our partner, it is a telltale sign that both of our inner children are out in full reactivity, stuck in a dance from childhood that may be decades old. These inner kiddies are home alone - with no babysitter. This is because we always attract our reciprocal. To the degree we want emotional maturity, is the degree we will attract someone who is ready for it. The challenge is to catch this acting out, see it as the venting of unfinished business of the past and be proactive in healing it. Otherwise, true unhappiness and dissatisfaction will continue.

HOW DO WE GO FROM SUCH UNCONSCIOUS ACTING OUT WITH EACH OTHER?

KNOW YOURSELF

Get to know who you are in terms of key childhood influences and wounding and then in calm moments, honestly assess when you are projecting these onto your partner. Compassionately see your partner for the wounds that deeply affected him or her and where he or she may be projecting these onto you.

CATCH THE TRIGGERS

John Gray suggests effective letter writing in *Mars and Venus Together Forever: Relationship Skills for Lasting Love*. David Richo and Kathlyn Hendricks give helpful techniques to work with the inevitable projections and reactivity that will arise, in *How to be an Adult in Relationships: The Five Keys to Mindful Loving*. Eckhart Tolle, in *A New Earth*, shows how the pain body of the past can sabotage our current relationships now.

FRIEND OR FOE?

Make a commitment to go from being victim to your partner to being each other's ally in this healing journey that intimate partnership ultimately is. Seeing life with a sense of humour goes a long way when we acknowledge to each other that we are in the same boat together and what we are really doing in our relationship.

Like it or loathe it, intimate relationship is the most dynamic, potent terrain that encourages us to grow up emotionally. It can potentially set us free from the past and spawn us into a gratifying, fulfilling now. May the ride be a joyful one.

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