



PHILOSOPHY

New Relationships, Old Trauma

AOM & OTHER HEALING STRATEGIES

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Being in love is one the most beautiful and enjoyable experiences. Most of us are willing to pay almost any price to have that experience, and still often find it elusive or fleeting. Navigating the ups and downs of loving relationships are often challenging — even for the most psychologically balanced among us.

The Relationship Under Siege

Lots of us are avoiding committed relationships. According to the U.S. Census Bureau 53 percent of all women and 47 percent of all men aged 18 or older were single in 2014. Compare that to the 1976 census when only 37.4 percent of Americans 18 and over were single.

Have become more commitment phobic since then? Why are such huge numbers of people staying out of committed intimate relationships, even though being in one is one of our most powerful drives and desires? One big answer — trauma.

Traumatic Experience

A major reason the majority of adults in our country are not in committed relationships is because so many of them have been traumatized. Some people know it and clearly remember something terrible that happened to them. Plenty more just live with what I call "low-grade PTSD" (Post-traumatic stress disorder).

They may not remember any *one* big thing that happened to them, but nonetheless their brains and nervous systems are on high alert much of the time. This makes it close to impossible to let someone else into their space without feeling panicky.



According to TCM our interpersonal boundaries are regulated by the "Triple Warmer and Pericardium" functions. The "Triple Warmer" represents our outer boundaries in relationships with others, while the "Pericardium" regulates our inner relationship with ourselves, including our ability to experience intimacy.

A person who can freely choose to move between autonomy and intimacy has well developed interpersonal boundaries. Once a person, animal or situation proves itself to be safe and comfortable they can then choose to let down their boundaries and be more intimate with them.

Sounding Siren

People who have been through significant trauma, especially childhood abuse have a much harder time letting their guard down. It has been demonstrated in many studies that trauma literally rewires the brain and endocrine system to stay on high alert most of the time. This prevents us from being able to be intimate with others.

People with PTSD may either avoid sex like the plague or may be promiscuous and have it freely with lots of people. Both of these behaviors are most likely an avoidance of real intimacy.

Here are three ways relationships get hijacked by trauma.

One: Stuck in Overdrive

Our brains have a highly evolved alarm system to protect us from danger. Input from our nervous system and senses converge in a brain area called the thalamus. This input is sorted and then passed

in two directions.

One, is down to the amygdala — two almond-shaped bulbs that sit in the limbic, or emotional area of the brain. Input *also* goes up to the frontal lobes of the brain, the area where thinking and reasoning are processed.

When a perception of possible or imminent danger hits this system there is a check and balance between the "high road" of the frontal lobes and the "low road" of the limbic brain. In other words, the amygdala prepares you for fight or flight and the frontal lobes take a bit more time to think about it — is this really of concern?

People who grew up with trauma in childhood often have a hard time discriminating between the need to respond to real threats and ability to relax in the face of harmless encounters. A major factor in our ability to be cool, calm and collected is the amount of the neurotransmitter serotonin that our brains produce.

In the animal kingdom dominant animals have higher serotonin levels, while those low on the pecking order have lower levels. So high serotonin levels seems to be correlated to self-confidence and higher levels of self-esteem, and lower levels the opposite.

Two: A Bad Remodeling Job

Neuroplasticity is the ability of the brain and nervous system to remodel itself based on repetitive input. Neuroplasticity is a double edged sword.

Children who grow up in relatively secure families develop brains that could stay cool and collected in the face of possible threats. They also can develop the ability to have intimacy with trusted people. This is the beneficial side of neuroplasticity.

The other edge of the sword happens when children grow up in abusive families while their sensitive brains are forming. Because they rarely feel safe in their own homes, and some of the people who are supposed to be their caretakers are also hurting them regularly, their brains get molded to stay on high alert.

They rarely, if ever get the "all clear" signal that lets their alarm system relax and stand down.

As a result it is difficult to impossible for them to move from autonomy to intimacy as adults. Even when a partner proves himself to be a truly nice, trustworthy person an abuse survivor may not be able to open up to him. Or she may lash out at unpredictable times, getting labeled as "high maintenance" or worse.

This behavior really has little to do with her present time partner — it is the PTSD in action. Of course traumatized men exhibit similar behaviors. This has been responsible for a great deal of domestic violence or emotional withdrawal after military veterans return home from active duty.

After going through the agony of this through a series of failed relationships many trauma survivors choose to become part of the majority of adults avoiding committed intimate relationships.

Three: Mr. or Ms. Wrong

Another way traumatized people miss out on intimacy is through the people they attract. People who were abused as children tend to keep attracting abuse in their adulthood relationships.

Women who had been molested or neglected as children had a 700 percent higher likelihood of being raped as adults than girls who did not experience abuse. Girls who saw their mothers getting beaten had a much higher incidence of experiencing domestic violence as adults.¹

Finding a Solution

Fortunately there are new healing methods that have shown far better long term results without dependence on medication. Some of the most promising therapies include: EMDR, Acupuncture and Biofield Healing.

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)

Often called Rapid Eye Movement therapy is when a therapist moves their finger or a pen back and forth in front of the client's face, asking her to track the movement with her eyes. At the same time the therapist asks the client a series of questions that could bring up the memory of the traumatic events. This simple method has shown remarkably good results.

Acupuncture

There are many acupuncture points that directly connect with the deep parts of our consciousness affected by trauma. A skilled use of these points in the context of a trusting practitioner-client relationship can be very supportive for survivors of trauma. The use of ghost points, internal dragon points and those used for draining aggressive energy have been highly effective for this type of application.

Biofield Healing

This is the primary healing system that I use with clients who have been through trauma and are expressing symptoms of PTSD. This involves working in their energy field to re-connect their minds and spirits to their bodies.

It is a profound process that often allows clients to rapidly release themselves from past trauma and learn to be comfortable in their own skin.

Clients sometimes go through what I call "initiations" as they go through Biofield healing. This is a powerful experience of their souls more fully inhabiting their bodies, often for the first time in their lives.

People who go through these spontaneous initiations often develop new interests or career directions, or feel freed up to get involved in more healthy relationships with higher consciousness partners.

I combine Biofield healing with vibrational medicine and intuitive coaching as needed to relieve pain, boost energy levels and empower them to move forward living a fulfilling, creative life.

One vibrational method I use involves stimulating sets of acupuncture points on opposite sides of the body with microcurrent and color light wands. By switching the direction of the current flow back and

forth through the head area this method has produced results similar to EMDR, and in many cases, exceeding it.

All of these therapeutic methods mentioned here help trauma survivors develop a more grounded and healthy relationship with their bodies. They can all help people to feel safer and less liable to be hijacked by old memories of abuse.

These methods tend to work better than talk therapies or drug therapies because people are doing the real inner work of remodeling their brains and learning that it is safe to fully inhabit their bodies.

References

1. Van Der Kolk B. "The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma." *Penguin Books*, London, England, 2015; 87.

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