A History of Imago

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Introductory Comments

*Imago Relationship Therapy
  *Co-created by Harville Hendrix, PhD and Helen LaKelly Hunt, PhD
  *Developed the concept of a “conscious partnership”

What is Imago?

* Imago Relationship Therapy is a theoretical model for working with couples derived from years of couples therapy experience, and a synthesis of psychological theories, spiritual traditions, and contemporary physical and human sciences.
What lead to the Development of Imago?

- A shift from the Individual Paradigm to the Relational Paradigm

Individual Paradigm

- Descartes: isolated mind
- Newton: isolated objects
- Darwin: survival of the fittest
- Enlightenment: there are universals that can be known by reason
- Scientific Method: truth of nature can be known objectively by an observing rational mind
- Democracy: freedom, autonomy, independence of the individual

Vertical Organization of Experience

- Individual is foundational
- Everything happens inside the individual
- Problem is inside the individual
- Solution happens inside the individual
Relational Paradigm

- Freud's Relational Intuitions
- Quantum Cosmology
- Spiritual Traditions
- Post-Darwinian Anthropology
- Relational Psychology
- Developmental Social Psychology
- Contemporary Interpersonal Neurobiology

Horizontal Organization of Experience

- Relationship is foundational
- Everything happens between persons
- Problem is between persons
- Solution happens between persons

Primary Sources of Influence for Imago

- Freud's relational intuitions
- Object relation's focus on the object
- Erikson's developmental stages
- Attachment Theory's focus on subject
- Harry Stack Sullivan's focus on the interpersonal
- Martin Buber's focus on the "between"
- Relational Psychoanalysis focus on "participation"
- Quantum Physics focus on universal connection
- Spiritual traditions that focus on the "oneness" of the universe
Components of Imago

- A Cosmology: Meta-theory
- An Epistemology: A way of knowing
- An Anthropology: Nature of being human
- A Relational Psychology: A theory of couplehood
- A Diagnosis: A theory of the human problem
- A Therapy: A theory of the solution to the human problem
- An Integrated Therapeutic Process
- A New Way of Loving and Living
- A Community with a Vision

The Big Idea:

- Our unconscious mind actually chooses our committed partner
- Why? In order to finish childhood (the unconscious relationship agenda)
- So the goal of Imago therapy is to align our conscious mind with our unconscious relationship agenda

The Premise of Imago

- We are born whole
- We are wounded in childhood
- We develop defenses that we carry into our adulthood
- We seek to regain our original wholeness
- So we are unconsciously attracted to a partner that has all the traits necessary to re-activate childhood wounding
- Imago match
- Goal is to “do-over” childhood and heal our old wounds
The Problem...

- This is an unconscious process
- Our conscious mind didn’t inform us of this agenda!
- So we think that our partner changed, wants us to change, etc
- Thus leading to an extremely un-fun relationship space
- aka: the Power Struggle

Stages of the Relationship Journey:

The Journey

Romantic Love
What is Romantic Love?

- An Emotional Experience
- A Selection Process
- A Temporary State
- Unconscious
- Function: To bring together and bond two incompatible people

This is Your Brain in Love:

**Ventral Tegmental Area:**
primitive reptilian reward system, needs, craving, same way as cocaine

**Caudate nucleus:**
calculating gains and losses, risk-taking

Communicate with each other as part of a circuit

The Journey:

Romantic Love

The Power Struggle
What is the Power Struggle?

- Second stage of relationship
- Supposed to happen once bonding is complete
- Supposed to end
- Growth trying to happen
- Once this is recognized, can become a Growth Struggle

The Journey: Re-commitment

The Journey: Doing the Work
The Journey: Awakening

The Journey: Real Love

The Tool:

- The Imago Dialogue
  - Basic foundational tool that can be used in many ways with a never-ending amount of topics
  - Goal is to use it for both positive comments and challenging/frustrating issues
Specific Phrases for the Imago Dialogue:

**Mirroring**
Let me see if I've got you.
I heard you say... or You said....
Am I getting you? or Did I get that?
Is there more about that?

**Validation**
You make sense to me, and what makes sense
is....
I can understand that ... given that....
I can see how you would see it that way
because sometimes I do....

**Empathy**
I imagine you might be feeling....
Is that what you are feeling?

Imago Relationship Therapy

- Therapist as facilitator, relationship rather than the individuals, is the client
- Revolutionizing concepts for relationship therapy - teaching couples how to connect in new ways to facilitate one another's healing and growth
- Healing the past in the present heals the past in the past
- As brain science developed, the underlying mechanisms of the Imago dialogue were more fully understood
  - Can't react and listen at the same time
  - Mirroring forces the cortex online which overrides the reptilian brain reactivity

Love does not consist in gazing at each other but in looking outward together in the same direction.

-Antoine de Saint-Exupery
A New Way to Love

- Equal Partners in Conscious Partnership
- Acceptance of the equality of your partner
- Shared power with your partner
- Mutual responsibility with your partner
- Priority of partnership needs over personal needs
- Instead of... “What do I need from this relationship?”
- It becomes... “What does this relationship need from me?”

Impact of Imago

- Oprah has featured Harville Hendrix and Imago Relationship counseling 17 times, and included Imago in the list of “Unforgettable! Oprah’s Top 20 shows”
- Worldwide - Imago is in over 20 countries with over 2000 Certified Imago therapists across the globe.
- His work provides an effective model for clinicians to use with couples and families
- Imago therapy acts as support to other therapeutic intervention (EMDR, ADHD, Addiction Recovery)

Could Imago ever hurt?

- Harville says that when used correctly, the Imago Dialogue will “always lead to a neutral or positive outcome...always.”
Criticism of Imago

- Unnatural
- Consistency is difficult
- Availability to all
  - Imago community is actively working on this!

Availability to All

- Couplehood Programs
- Marriage Education Initiative
- Agency Partnerships
- Scholarships for Couples Workshops

Beyond Couples...

- Individual work stemming from the Keeping the Love You Find book is very useful with individual clients (whether single or in relationship)
- Facilitating groups for individuals using an Imago Group model is also an effective healing and growth tool
- Dialogue tools beneficial with Parents and Children
- Beyond our field - Imago at work with corporations via Dialogfirst
Imago’s Big Mission:

- Healing the world, one couple at a time
- Healthy relationships
- Healthy children
- Healthy world

The fleet...

- 1992 - Keeping the Love You Find: A Personal Guide
- 2005 - Receiving Love: Transform Your Relationship by Letting Yourself be Loved
- Upcoming... The Best Little Book on Marriage Ever Written

Sources:

Sources:


