

Sex In The Age Of Relating

My work with couples began with a personal conviction that men and women are basically compatible, and that the problems experienced in relationships - no matter how frustrating - were inevitable for growth. Many people have felt that they have had to defend themselves in a relationship for the sake of personal development. I pursued the view that relating offered a dynamic for personal integration - that the challenges of a relationship provide essential steps in the development of an individual. Evolvement in a relationship and personal growth could be one and the same process. The discovery of emotional polarity supported this view.

Emotional Polarity

Observation in my therapeutic work had revealed the breath-holding tendency of people in states of anxiety or intolerable levels of excitation. Individuals have the tendency to hold breath either on an inhale or an exhale. It will be one or the other and does not vary within an individual. In mate selection, one instinctively chooses a partner with the opposite tendency. Inhalers instinctively mate with exhalers. This implies complementary emotional orientations:

Breath Tendency	Emotional Polarity
<i>inhale</i>	<i>outer-oriented</i>
<i>exhale</i>	<i>inner-oriented</i>

These inward-outward differences can initially be a source of conflict, but they become supportive and stimulating with the emotional evolvement of the relationship. The difficulties involved in the process of relating are not simply founded on personal fault; they involve issues of consciousness and human potential. These findings seem to indicate the probability of an evolutionary intelligence - that life is a progression of consciousness with schematic problems that incite the need for growth.

Since the complexities of growth in a relationship seemed without alternative, it became important to utilize whatever could be of therapeutic value that was organic and natural to relating. It was this thinking that led to a focus on the sexual exchange. Since the process for couples had included extensive work on perception and the subtle energy factors involved in communication, it became evident that the sexual exchange could not be left as a relatively arbitrary experience.

The Concept of Sexual Alignment

The attempt to make sex a communication resulted in the understanding and formulation of sexual alignment, as articulated in our paper on sexual compatibility which follows. The specific alignment which we documented seems consistent with Freud's earlier vision:

This adequate activity consists in a complicated spinal reflex act . . . and in all the psychical processes necessary to induce this reflex . . . must absolutely be carried into operation.

The concept of alignment is an inevitable consideration as issues of compatibility become more of an acknowledged concern both personally and professionally. Masters and Johnson, in their pioneering research on sexual response, had actually approximated the position of alignment in considering a position for optimal genital stimulation. They dismissed this possibility as awkward, and difficult to maintain with mounting excitement. In their reasoning, they failed to deduce the dynamics of co-ordinated movement which would have made this positioning possible - and the emotional implications for such sensitive interaction between partners.

The same confusion regarding sexual movement is reflected in the misunderstanding of orgasm response. In studying the response in an individual, researchers miss the simplest truth - sexual response is the *interaction* between two people. Orgasm is not by the design of nature intended to be the reflex of one person. It is for this reason that the orgasm of an isolated individual appears spastic in character. The positioning of alignment made possible the form of interaction which could result in an interrelated response.

Conscious Relating

The connectedness possible in the interaction of alignment makes evident the *quality* of exchange that could characterize every aspect of human communication. This kind of connection is unique in feeling. It can only happen in a true exchange when partners are direct and receptive in the same moment. The quality of such exchange has a vivid excitement and sense of expansiveness. The synergic effect has implications of a new potential in relating.

Our evolving sensibilities have brought us to the threshold of a new consciousness. What in the past has sufficed for relating is no longer sufficient. Yet, our hope for happiness in a love relationship is right and possible. It is not by coincidence that relationships are in crisis; our struggle is an initiation into a new age of relating.

References

1. Freud, S. *Collected Papers, Vol. 1*, (Hogarth Press, 1924) p. 98.
2. Masters, W. H., and Johnson, V. E. *Human Sexual Response*, (Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1966), p. 60.