

The Enigma of Childhood: The Profound Impact of the First Years of Life on Adults as Couples and Parents

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Introduction

I propose you the reader to join me, throughout my book, on a journey across childhood experiences. It might be an exciting journey across some crucial developmental processes that evolves during the first three years of life and continue to express themselves throughout our lifespan. You may disclose along your reading why I conceive relationships between spouses as “The Art of Couplehood”, and why happiness is linked to love relations. Moreover, the book sheds light on why rewarding relationships are so difficult to maintain and so easily love relationships are annihilated. The book is focuses also on how and why our childhood experiences influence our relations with our children and partners and shape our inter-actions with others in so many modes of encounters. The book deals with the enigma of childhood experiences and its impact on couplehood and parenthood.

I wished to enlighten in my book our innate need for familiarity and our attendant alertness to strangeness (and inclination to racism); — a process that is operating in numerous and varied situations and phenomena of everyday life. I show how, from babyhood onwards, our healthy narcissism propels us to protect the familiarity in the Self against unpleasant and painful invaders’ sensations triggered by the strange and uncanny. That’s why we are so often injured by others “saying”. This guides many of our actions, both conscious and unconscious, throughout life. It is elaborated and illustrated in the book, using examples from everyday life.

Endless reverberations from our childhood experiences echo in present time, so much so that our self and the actual experience will be colored by the sense of familiarity. Otherwise, we would experience a sense of chaos in every activity which will be endlessly experienced as a new and a strange one.

I hope that my book “The Enigma of Childhood” would enable you, the reader, to familiarize with the child hidden in yourself, representing all the memory traces of your first years of life which you are unable to remember cognitively. These traces of your experiences, which are endlessly reverberating within you, represent your sense of familiarity of your Self. Hence, you unconsciously wish, as all of us, to repeat these echoing-familiarities in your adulthood.

The Enigma of Childhood

Imagine now what happens whenever you encounter your spouse who has inevitably others memory traces then you. For example, he likes to be kissed on the cheek while you like to be kissed on your mouth; he is expressing his frustrations by impulsivity while you are expressing them by being injured; he has other touches of bonding, and other needs. His behavior is experienced by you as otherness and as strangeness to you. Still you really love each other although you have so many clashes [1].

How will you manage to maintain your love relationships? This unavoidably discrepancies repeatedly initiate injuries and struggles

between partners and sometimes it moves the couple toward detaching one from the other, instead of reassuring each other by love refueling and reconciliation. The Enigma of Childhood deals with these issues and especially with the need to find ways to tolerate the otherness in order to create what I named the Art of Couplehood. It means that each of them endeavors to tolerate the otherness of his partner while they try to refining and taming, fueling and refueling their bonding, re-joining in partnership and separating from jointness. Furthermore, throughout reading the book we may disclose the links between the skill to preserve each his true self and his separateness, as well his relationships in intimacy and concomitantly to tolerate the otherness. I defined such object relations as Jointness-Separateness.

Let us enlighten one or two of these issues that the book deals with.

How can we define Healthy Narcissism? In my book I elaborate this issue in a novelty re-conceptualization. We are all appealed by familiarity, preserve our familiarity and resist strangeness, and very often we feel injured by the otherness. These emotional reactions represent, in my view, narcissistic processing. I elucidate this narcissistic processing as an Emotional Immune System, processing like our biological counterpart, it means: attraction to the familiar, and concomitantly resisting the strangeness and otherness. Both systems, the emotional and the biologic Immunological are processing to preserve the familiar code of the Self cell’s protein- the familiar self, by triggering alertness to the otherness and even rejecting strangeness invaders (having other protein code). Sometimes we find ourselves even as racist. This dynamic of the Emotional Immune System – of the Healthy Narcissism – enables the safeguarding of the continuity, cohesion and intactness of the true self, of the individuality/separateness and in the same time of the intimate love relationships between these separated partners. It emphasizes the need to balance our attraction to familiarity with alertness to the otherness and strangeness.

I hope that now it is more obvious why it is so important for all of us to identify our familiar-self, familiar objects and familiar surrounding while we are injured by otherness or flooded by stranger anxiety.

The book goes on to show how despite the normal course of healthy narcissistic development, which occurs when we succeed in befriending strangeness and otherness while expanding ‘emotional intelligence,’ we

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nonetheless continue to respond with narcissistic injury to instances of otherness/strangeness, whether in external or internal environments. Ideally, our innate narcissism is able to catch up and 'update' the familiar emotional data that comprise our overall sense of Self and Other, resulting in a larger holder of experience and concomitantly of tolerance toward the otherness.

We generally accredit extremists' emotional reactions - like racism, Self-regarding, Self-centered without the capacity to consider the other; or being incessantly injured while blaming always others and annihilating incessantly love relations etc., - to pathological narcissism. Generally we don't speak on healthy narcissism.

I want to stress that the narcissism that I discuss about as healthy and normative narcissism is not altering the narcissism described in the professional writings — my wish is to scrutinize the healthy and positive aspects of narcissism.

We may differentiate between healthy and pathological narcissism by the capacity (or lack thereof) to preserve, restore and re-stabilize one's sense of one's familiarity-Self - after being injured by the otherness. Healthy narcissism may be differentiating from the pathological one also by the skill to restore the familiarity of one's partners and especially of one's familiar relationships with them. The healthy aspects are understood as the immune of the familiar Self as separate and autonomous entity, as preserving the core of the 'true' self, as well as capable of tolerating the otherness and thus safeguarding their love relationships; whereas the pathological ones have to do with autoimmune processing the 'false self' assembled with primitive perceptions of self-objects units and characterized by merging, fusion, and symbiosis with the object.

Alongside Narcissism and object-relations (attachment), the Ego and individuation (and later the super-ego and the ideals of the ego) emerge to protect the Self against all those who threaten its familiarity.

The Enigma of Childhood is centering on the emotional development of the infant from birth until three years (on oral and anal stages of development). You may disclose in the book how the experiences in these years are unexpectedly appearing in our adulthood life not as a regression but mostly as a repeating of the familiarity of the Self.

Additionally, the book scrutinizes an important discrepancy between the Ego's adaptation mechanisms and the Ego's defense mechanisms. These mechanisms are differing by their 1. Emotional objectives; 2. Modes of operation; and 3. Emotional costs/benefits.

The conceptualizations in my book are accompanied by very many clinical vignettes and moving examples linked to my observations of children, to my dynamic psychoanalysis and psychotherapy working through and they are illustrating my theoretical innovations. All these concepts are scrutinized in new theoretical and clinical terms, by that come alive in a readily accessible form to both professional and lay readers (It is written in a way that the general public may elect to skip some of the more theoretical sections, such as its review of the literature, and focus on the explanations and clinical vignettes provided in each chapter). I endeavored to make my writings as clear and accessible to the reader as possible, (hence, to avoid resistances to the strangeness), so that it will be treasured by parents and helping professionals alike.

Conclusion

In sum, The Enigma of Childhood elaborates four re-conceptualizations of known concepts: The healthy narcissism as an Emotional Immune System, jointness-separateness as a key facet of normal object relations and of the art of couplehood, the Ego's adaptation and defense mechanisms as well as the consolidation of the true Self and of the separation-individuation-intimacy. The attraction to the familiar and alertness/resisting the strangeness may provide us an acknowledgement of why the first years of life have such an impact on our adulthood life as couples and parents. The developmental principles including the clinical vignettes outlined in The Enigma of Childhood deliver a window into both our own and our loved ones' emotional reactions; hence, it may facilitate the tolerance toward the otherness of our partners in everyday life which might thus reveal the concealed access to the capacity to be happy and love/loved relationships.

References

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