

“Love is the answer:

Educating people on self-love and romantic/intimate relationships”

A final project submitted for the requirements

of the diploma in Process Work Training

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ABSTRACT

This project incorporates: my need to explore and better understand all the important elements in romantic/intimate relationships, my wish to share this understanding with other people who have the same need and my attempt to create a manual on experiential learning on couple relationships addressed to facilitators and with a target population of all those who wish to achieve a better understanding and personal growth around the issue of intimate relationships.

It is thus a step to my personal growth introspectively but also in my relationship with the world through the role of the educator.

In this essay I share the empowerment and transformation path I gained through working on my final project. I present some theoretical framework on romantic relationships, and attempt to bridge other theories with the one of Process Work. I also introduce some basic theories on adult learning and my insights from the creation of the essay and the manual.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This project is about the creation and application of a training manual in relationships based on the theory and techniques of Process Work. It has three important roots: my high dream of opening up to the role of teacher/educator, of doing worldwork using my knowledge, skills and experience and of my deep interest on human relationships.

The blend of these appeared as the idea to create a manual of an experiential training on intimate relationships which, in its final form, will include three parts each focusing on the different levels of relating: intrapersonal, interpersonal, transpersonal. This manual is addressed to facilitators wishing to provide intimate relationships' education to people and to all people out there who face difficulties on their intimate relationships or have the need of a deeper understanding about themselves and their partners in their relating.

For the requirements of the final project – given the original time limitations, the intrusion of Covid-19 into our lives (which became the inspirational motive for the creation of educational material) and the long list of difficulties I faced in my life, ranging from less serious to life threatening - I completed the first out of the three parts of the manual, focusing on the intrapersonal level of relationship. The next two parts will focus on the interpersonal and transpersonal levels of relationships respectively and my plan is a fourth one which will focus on human sexuality and sex in the relationship. I take my first steps on an educational path in Relationships, with the emphasis being on couples' relating, based on the theory, techniques and practice of Process work, as it is an issue very important for my personal life (I have opened up, felt love & ecstasy, stumbled and tumbled down several times in my life in relationships), very challenging for my role as a therapist with individuals and couples and at the same time very central for all humanity.

This project is educative since the target is that the participants will gain some new insights and learn new skills in the ways that they relate with themselves and others. I started the work and based the design of this project on a fairly extensive, far from exhaustive, literature review on the different psychological theories and approaches on relationships, on Process Work views and practices on relationships, and on the theory and parameters of learning in order to design my workshop. Having been trained in the past in Family Therapy approach, I feel that its “touch”, intertwined with Process Work, is apparent throughout the project.

The questions I began with this project were the following:

1. How do I “build up” a workshop (i.e., How much theory, exercises, etc.) and a manual addressed to professionals at the same time?
2. How do I create a workshop on relationships in a way that appeals to different audiences in terms of gender, age, family condition, sexual orientation, income, local culture (city VS village), or other demographic parameters?
3. What is important for people to learn in order to achieve personal growth and be able to use this knowledge in their everyday life?

Purpose & Goals

The purpose of this project is to open up my wings to the world through the role of the educator. The idea of this project “landed” a while after the first quarantine for Covid-19 started on March 2020. By then I had already started working on another project, with similar purpose but quite a different mixture of goals. Nevertheless, the radical changes in the lives of billions of people on earth and my personal encounter on a national helpline as a volunteer psychologist, supporting people - terrified, lost, confused, lonely, grieving, in danger - of all ages and backgrounds all around Greece, urged me to change focus. It was very clear that this

urge wanted me to reach out to a world that closes down, so I started working on an online asynchronous education project on relationships, which, for reasons explained later in this essay, was finally formed as a manual of an education on relationships.

The goals of this project could be divided into two categories, the internal and the external:

Internal goals: Personal Growth

- 🚧 To challenge my edges around inner authority and come out to the world with faith in my knowledge, skills and metaskills, experience, as a psychologist and intern educator/teacher.
- 🚧 To gain a deeper knowledge and understanding on human relating, with emphasis on romantic/couple's relationships.
- 🚧 To gradually build up a path to also being a teacher/educator parallel to my therapist/facilitator role and professional identity.

External goals: Me and the World

- 🚧 To reach out and educate people on issues relating to their life and psychology. The target audience are adults who may have or not prior experience to personal development (psychotherapy, counseling, educational workshops).
- 🚧 To create a quality education based on scientific theory and practice and supported by my experience on the fields of psychology and psychotherapy.
- 🚧 To create and implement an application of Process Work theory and techniques through education.
- 🚧 To share this work and the experience while developing this project with the process work community all around the world.

A gradual unfolding of a dreaming

After finishing my graduate and postgraduate studies in psychology and with the advice of a family friend who was a therapist, I began my psychotherapy and training at AKMA (the Athenian Center of Human Study), the center of the Family Therapy paradigm in Greece. Dr. Vasso Vassiliou (the mother of Lily and Alexandra Vassiliou) was the head of the center and one of my teachers. As most trainees there, I felt awe, respect and love for this woman and her amazing work as a therapist, a teacher/educator, a researcher and overall, as an extraordinary human being. During these years in AKMA I had my first encounter with Process Work through two seminars Alexandra Vassiliou and Lena Aslanidou offered to us studying there. Back then I believed that being a therapist was one of the hardest things to accomplish as the responsibility of the role, the fact of the delicacy needed working with the peoples' psyche, and my huge inner critic and demand of perfection made it seem as an "Everest" I would never be able to master properly. Dr. Vassiliou was the person who first empowered me, when in a seminar she asked something from the group, I replied, and she turned to me, looked me in the eyes and told me "You are going to be a very good therapist".

Almost twenty years later, during the second year of my process work training I saw a dream. I saw a beautiful old detached house with yard (similar to the one AKMA was). In a big room there was an old lady with grey hair talking to a group of people. Her cheeks were red; she was full of excitement, life, tenderness and love for these people and for what she was doing. These were her students. In the dream I thought "Oh, its Dr. Vassiliou". I was not present in the scene; I was just an eye watching the scene from outside the window. Then I saw the old lady standing up, and coming towards the window. I could now see her face better. It wasn't Dr. Vassiliou. It was me.

My childhood dream

My childhood dream was a repetitive dream throughout my childhood. I think that the last times I dreamed it were in my adolescence. I had always experienced it as frightening, as it evoked feelings of deep loneliness, abandonment, helplessness and connected me with the unfairness and cruelty of the world.

“I was all alone in the middle of an open market with loads of people. It was a morning hour. I had lost my mother, but somehow, I knew that my mother had the intention to lose me, she had abandoned me. I was trying to scream but I had no voice and wanted to run to her but I couldn't move. I could see her running away, her blond hair stood out above all other heads, and I could feel her internal turmoil. Then the scene was changing, it was night and I was present in a Ku Klux Klan gathering. Dozens of men wore the white robes with the heads covered with the hood. They had started a huge fire and they had kidnapped a young black man (or boy) who they intended to burn alive. I was again alone, again feeling that my mother had left me there on purpose to abandon me. I was terrified and was trying to hide. I could understand the extreme danger of my life and that black man's life. I was waking up at this point.”

The first time I worked on my childhood dream the facilitator (a friend of mine who had just finished an intense training in Portland) asked me to go back to the dream and continue it. I saw that I finally find my mother, she takes me by the hand and we quietly get and hide in the dense forest, we walk through bushes and plants until we reach a point that the forest ends. The city lies underneath with its lights. Although it seems quite far away, we know we are secure and close to “civilization”. At that point, few years before I joined the process work training, I had no idea what that dream meant for me.

Having worked with the dream several times since then I came to understand that the “weak mother” who could not support, follow and nurture Eirini (myself) had to leave me. I had to be left alone feeling small, weak, frightened and helpless in the open market (life) in order to find my own strength, my power, my abilities, myself, my freedom. I had to be left alone in the KKK gathering to find my place in relation to worldwork issues such as power, racism, injustice, life & death, in order to find my way in this world and the meaning of my life. When I worked with the most disturbing figure, the X energy, the figure of KKK, I suddenly became a werewolf. My power was immense and all my focus was on my sight. I was looking around searching amongst people to choose the ones who could join me. The werewolf wanted to create an “army” against all malevolence in the world.

It’s so interesting, that for the first time at this very moment that I write these lines while searching on google the translation of the word werewolf from Greek to English (I didn’t know the English word), information about werewolves appeared in my screen. So, for the first time I read that the archetype of werewolf “represents a metamorphosis, a symbol of a literal and spiritual transformation in life. It represents an awakening from darkness and fear to embrace something new and exciting, as well as the willingness to connect with the heritage passed down to us from the past”.

The way to my powers and path in life presupposes to get together with the mother figure in me, hand by hand, in order to cross the scary dense forests of life in the middle of the night – on a personal and collective level - until light and civilization appears. Working on my edges around personal authority and coming out to the world with this project is a way of getting hand by hand with this mother figure.

II. Literature Review

RELATIONSHIPS: Theories & Views

I. Classical Psychoanalysis and Object Relations Theory

According to the Freudian psychoanalytic view, the creation and maintenance of all the close, the emotionally important interpersonal relationships are governed by the human need for satisfaction of instinctual and biological drives. According to this view childhood experiences form patterns which last for a lifetime, thus in all human relationships hides an infantile pattern. Developing this understanding further, the British Psychoanalytic School, through the observations of its main figure Melanie Klein with small kids, supported the view that the central element in a child's development are their emotional bonds and that their inner world is the world of interpersonal relationships. That is the basis of Object Relation Theory (Papadaki – Michailidi, 2012) which reveals as the primary human motive the creation of satisfying relationships.

Object Relation Theory introduced the concept of “internal object”, which is a mental and emotional image of an external object. The infant projects to the internal object aspects of the self. As stated on the Melanie Klein Trust Organization site (<https://melanie-klein-trust.org.uk/>),

“a complex interaction continues throughout life between the world of these internalized figures and objects and in the real world via repeated cycles of projection and introjections. The most important internal objects are of the parents and especially the mother or the breast into which the infant projects its loving or hating aspects” (2021).

It is interesting that the internal objects exist within the self and may be represented in dreams, fantasies, and in language. Then, aspects of the self or an internal object are split off and attributed to an external one. This is the so-called Projective Identification, which is an unconscious fantasy and is an enrichment or extension of Freud's concept of projection.

But what are the "unconscious phantasies"? It's a term Freud introduced to explain what he thought of as "a phylogenetically inherited capacity of the human mind" (ibid., 2021). Klein adopted his idea but broadened it considerably, as her work with children gave her extensive experience of the wide-ranging content of their fantasies. She understood fantasies as a basic capacity underlying and shaping thought, dreams, symptoms and patterns of defense. Along with her successors, Klein emphasized that fantasies interact reciprocally with experience to form the developing intellectual and emotional characteristics of the individual. They are the mental representation of the somatic events in the body that comprise the instincts, and are physical sensations interpreted as relationships with objects that cause those sensations. Her findings and her progressive and controversial theory became the base of important developments in understanding human relating and radical advances of psychoanalytic approaches to couple theory" (ibid., 2021).

II. Attachment Theory

Bowlby and later others, incorporated in Object Relations Theory elements from ethology, biology of evolution and experimental psychology and created the basic principles of Attachment Theory (Papadaki – Michailidi, 2012). According to this theory, humans develop internalized and automated systems of behaviors which target in the reassurance and preservation of proximity among the newborn and the primary caretaker, usually the mother. These attachment behaviors have been developed through natural selection and are biological in their base. In order for the newborn to survive powerful and stable bonds of love are necessary. Therefore, the somatic contact, the smile, the cry, the interplay and the stress

of separation are some of the most common attachment behaviors. Human need for stable love relationships is not apparent in the first years of age nor is reduced over time; it's lifelong and universal (ibid., 2012).

For an attachment to be safe the basic needs of security and comfort have to be met and in addition research shows that human happiness and psychosomatic health is strongly based on the secure interpersonal attachment relationships people will form and preserve during their life (ibid., 2012).

Papadaki and Michailidi (2012) explain that attachment theory claims that the relationship patterns formed in childhood are automated over time and become a central structural element of the adult personality. Based on these patterns we try to foresee others' behaviors and reactions and to plan our own behavior in order to achieve our goals. So, though these patterns are necessary for our survival they work against us in many occasions. People who grew up in dysfunctional families unconsciously have the tendency to repeat the dysfunctional or even catastrophic patterns and this way they remain in a familiar world. Their insecurity makes whatever is new and strange to seem a frightening experience. These internal patterns also alter the cognitive field with misconceptions so people who have experienced pain and insecurity in childhood are (unconsciously) seeking those things in their environment that will reward their negative view for the world or recall the ugly and difficult moments of their lives and focus on their failures (actually creating a vicious cycle of self-fulfilling prophecies). They have difficulty in trusting and very often they deeply believe that relationship problems solely derive from their partners.

The goal of (psychoanalytic) therapy is "to help people develop safe attachment relationships and fruitful interactions out of which they will experience joy, independence and self-power" (Papadaki – Michailidi, 2012, p.189). When two people first meet, the parental attachment patterns are unconsciously taking place. Often the choice might be made momentarily – love

at first sight – due to a very powerful attraction of something that feels familiar. Then the two lovers will relive for a period the ultimate attachment - the merge – until the same insecurities, tensions and frustrations which existed in their relations of their origin families will be brought up again. Once more, the disappointment of merging, the fear of separation and the nightmare of abandonment will be reborn and soon the relationship will become a field of reliving the unsolved dilemmas and of painful conflicts of the beginning of life of both the partners. This unconscious partner choice however, and the painful repetition of childhood patterns is a chance to come in touch with their repressed sides providing them with the opportunity of a last try for a more successful resolution on their internal conflict. So what initially was attractive is now the source of strain (ibid., 2012).

III. The Systems approach or Family Therapy

Object relations theory lent itself to the conceptualization of couple and family interaction which then led to the application of fundamental ideas of the general systems theory in human interaction. Systems theory, an interdisciplinary theory, and the communications approach gave rise to the Family Theory Perspective. This perspective holds the more general assumption that any behavior occurring in a human system – couple, family, group, etc. – is produced and maintained by all parts involved in that system (Walrond-Skinner, 1979). The dyad, the couple, demonstrates system characteristics, namely that change in one part of the system (the one partner) has inevitable effects on the rest of the system (the other partner); that there are homeostatic mechanisms maintained by feedback which tend to stability; and there is a system of rules, implicit or explicit, governing the system. Any given act of one partner is both a response to previous acts of the other and a stimulus to subsequent acts (ibid., 1979).

In the breakthrough work of Watzlawick et al (1967) the axioms of communication are identified. In any interaction communication is unavoidable, any signal - verbal or non-verbal

- is a message and both the content and the context influence the meaning and the naming of behavioral implications. The people involved in the interaction perceive differently what is communicated and either the one mirrors the other's behavior (symmetrical communication) or complements the other's behavior with the one being "on top" of the other (complementary communication).

Family therapy aims at improving the couple's skill and accuracy in sending out and receiving messages and the discrepancies of communication, especially between verbal and non-verbal modes of communication including symptomatic behavior. Emphasis is given to the feeling and personal meaning of communication both those claimed for the self and those attributed to the other in any given interaction, and to progress from communicating with terminal hypotheses (ie explanations of the problem which have no implication for change, eg he is always nervous, or she is like her mother) to instrumental hypotheses which offer a model with behavioral consequences (Walrond-Skinner, 1979).

Each system has a function which is defined by its goal. In order to perform its function the system creates a certain structure and as noted above is trying by all means to maintain this structure. Each system exists intertwined with other systems, thus changes in its environment cause changes in its structure, making it more complex. A couple or a family is a psycho-social entity (Kataki, 1998). In the last 50 years in Greece, and more or less likely in many places around the world, the goal of becoming couple or family has radically changed. It is not surprising that there is confusion as to the function of the couple-relationship and its structure. Three radically different modes of couple and family identities might now co-exist making relating a highly complex project: The traditional family based on interdependence and with survival as its goal, the nuclear family focused on the child needs having as a parallel goal social advancement, and the modern couple, which does not necessarily have the goal of creating a larger family system and targets self-actualization and communication (ibid., 1998).

Family therapy introduced an important view that problems are not necessarily always “owned by” one individual or another but may occur in the relational spaces between people. Thus, a dysfunctional couple may be seen as two independently well-functioning individuals who are mismatched in their values or expectations or who are failing to interact together satisfactorily. If relationships or systems are seen as dysfunctional in their own right then therapeutic attention may focus on the relationships or interactions rather than the individuals. Moreover, the notion of a dysfunctional relationship is outside the medical model of pathologizing or the “illness” approach to human problems. Family therapy is more a description of a change process where modification or development is the goal (Walrond-Skinner, 1979).

IV. Other approaches and methods

Numerous approaches and psychotherapeutic techniques in the psychology of relationships have been developed over the years, focusing on different aspects of intimate relating and proposing methods for working out the relationship difficulties.

Cognitive Behavioral Theory, focusing on the way a person’s cognitions, emotions and behaviors are connected and affect one another, has developed well-researched interventions that have been found to be of help in couples’ difficulties. Several methods are used such as assertiveness training, emotion regulation, skill building and cognitive restructuring. The undesirable interactions between the partners are identified and both partners learn to reinforce the desired rather than the maladaptive or symptomatic behavior of the other. The goals are specified through a chain of intermediate goals. Attitudes responsible for dysfunction or intervening negatively in the continuation of the program are also identified and work is done for their modification. More recent advances in couples therapy combine interventions of acceptance and change strategies with which partners are

supported to enhance intimacy (caring behaviors, communication and learn how to resolve differences) (<https://www.abct.org>, 2022).

One of the most well-established methods which is based on attachment theory is Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT). The founder Sue Johnson (Johnson, 2020) put all the emphasis on the emotional connection among the partners. For EFT, partners are trapped in their patterns, are trapped in a negative relationship dance where conflict is just the inflammation while the virus is the emotional disconnection. EFT therapy helps people acknowledge, connect and share their emotions; supports the couple to see each other's vulnerability, learn the emotional music, create moments of emotional safety and then recreate a safe and organic dance. They also promote the Hold me Tight programs, where they teach people how to conduct bonding conversations with their partners where fears, vulnerabilities and needs can be safely shared. The goal is again the creation of a safe attachment bond.

This is far from an exhaustive review on Relationship theories and views. It only provides an overview of understanding some of the variety of aspects, parameters and levels involved in intimate relating and the resulting complexity of relationships.

V. Philosophical views about love and romantic relationships

As many philosophers and academics wonder, do we humans know what love is?

As attachment theory proposes, any love experience starts with the direct attachment to the object. Aldo Carotenuto's (2002) point of view, with which I agree, is that almost like being in a hypnotic state romantic love causes a libido fixation on the beloved and it pushes us toward an ecstatic state. When facing the beloved, the one in love is experiencing a feeling of incredible fullness and of deprivation at the same time. Carotenuto emphasizes however, that although we feel that the beloved is the source of our euphoria, in reality love lives and is fed from what is happening inside us. He explains that love is an authentic psychological process

as it activates a new ability to getting to know the world and that the ability to keep alive a love relationship depends on the ability to share with the other the inner wealth deriving from the relationship. Carotenuto (2002) bluntly states that we are all naked in front of life's tragedy and pain. He suggests that our psychological growth depends on how much we will acknowledge that the others can never touch our life's boundaries or to interpret them. The obstacles we meet and the relationship experience tempt us to leave our fate on others' hands. But this is an illusion. He claims that we need to take all of life in our shoulders and to let the feeling of abandonment flood us, that means we need to live as abandoned. Only then life is in our hands and only then we are connected with life's meaning and with our very personal path.

In love and relating therefore we need to re-expose ourselves naked as when we were born in order to be "reborn". It's not random that rebirth appears repeatedly in myths throughout the world; it expresses a deep psychic truth. But do we humans know, understand what love is? Krishnamurti (2010) writes that there are so many ideas and ideologies around love so that we need to really free her of all the covers throughout centuries. Is security love? Is it the exchange of emotions? Is it an idea? Is it cultivated? Taught? Within human love exists pleasure, competition, jealousy, wish to possess, to overpower, to control. Then, is there some other kind of love which is divine and pure? But is it possible to divide love in sacred and dirty? In moral and amoral? Is love personal or impersonal? These are the fundamental questions Jiddu Krishnamurti poses about love to conclude to something close to what psychology acknowledges. He suggests that where there is fear there is no love and without love everyday life has no meaning. Love can be born when there is letting go. When there is no distance between me and the stars, me and the tree, me and the other. When the other is me.

PROCESS WORK & RELATIONSHIPS: connection to its roots

The other is me, this is a central aspect of Process Work's view in relationships (Mindell, 1987; Processwork Hub, 2016). In the Process Work paradigm relationships are understood as one of the channels of the dreaming process of a person and of the field, that is, one of the channels that we perceive experience and process consensus and non-consensus reality. Actually, the individual is a channel for the relationship and the relationship a channel for the individual.

In Process Work we see three levels of relating happening simultaneously: the intrapersonal, the interpersonal and the field (Processwork Hub, 2016), intertwining in a way with the tasks of family therapy and communication theory with analytic individual work and relational psychoanalysis. *Process* is what is already happening, not what should be done. It is the organic flow which creates relationships in the first place. So, in principle Process Work means to follow the way of nature (Goodbread, 1997). Therefore, when working with relationships, Process Work follows and unfolds the process of the particular partners and relationship by focusing not only on the intended communication but also on the unintended communication, which are called "double signals" (Mindell, 1987; Diamond & Jones, 2018). This unintended communication carries their inner, secondary (the unconscious fantasy in more analytic terms) process which plays a background but decisive role in binding people together and defining the nature of their relationship. Typically, the primary communication is so powerful that it manages to hypnotize both the sender and the receiver, obliterating their awareness of the unintended, dream-like process. These double signals however interrupt the couple's communication at such a great extent that the partners cannot understand each other, what is happening, and over what they are conflicting, and thus recycling confusions and tension. Mindell, following Jung's understanding, calls this second communication process dreambody language or dreaming process (Mindell, 1987; Diamond & Jones, 2018) as it is apparent not

only in verbal and non-verbal communication but also in the night dreaming of both partners. However, similar to Klein's theory that fantasies are a basic capacity underlying and shaping thought, dream, symptoms and patterns of defense Mindell (2011) made a breakthrough observation that the same dreaming process is also apparent in body sensations, symptoms or illness. He recognized that a skillful therapist can unfold the underlying dreaming process whether "catching" it through a dream, a symptom or a relationship problem (Diamond & Jones, 2018; Processwork Hub, 2016). Bringing in the quantum physics understanding of non-locality and entanglement, Mindell (1995) realized that a process's signals will come in abundance and will be underlying in all the infinite and unpredictable aspects of human existence. Ultimately Process Work is all about following the way of nature, what is already happening, and not what we think or imagine should happen. That is why the fixed states, roles, and convictions in relationships, about who is right or wrong have nothing to do with the relationship as these static parameters cannot replace the ongoing process occurring between the couple (and to each partner as well). No one is double-signaling on purpose, so background attitude is not blaming one another but be curious about and respecting the process; honoring that something unconscious manifests, exactly the same as when we dream. Therefore, the key to the entire personality of an individual and of a couple lies in appreciating intended and unintended information, the edges that exist in the identity of the individual or the couple, the function of the unconsciousness they create, and the value of the myths colliding on each side of the barrier (Mindell, 1987).

Jung's analytical psychology is one of Process Work foundation roots. As Jung (1989) framed it, all adult civilized persons have longings relating to desires and needs that remained unfulfilled and stem from those parts of the personality which have been marginalized from the total picture in favor of the adapted persona. Process work names this adapted persona a person's more "primary process" and avoids the terms of conscious and unconscious as the

primary process is also not fully conscious. This primary process incorporates all the “I am” statements, whatever I identify with. Whatever is marginalized from this primary identity constitutes the secondary process of an individual. Between primary and secondary processes lie the edge (s) to this unknown, marginalized self (Diamond & Jones, 2018; Processwork Hub, 2016). A more analytic view on inner processes and edges is presented in the manual designed for this final project.

For Jung (1989) salvation lies in our ability to bring unconscious urges to consciousness, in Process Work this structure would parallel with bringing the secondary processes to awareness. Jung understood that dreams were a means to that goal. He welcomed a holistic, teleological approach of human nature and relating, understanding that what has apparently been lost does not come to the fore again without sufficient reason. He believed that in the living psychic structure nothing takes place in a merely mechanical fashion; everything fits into the economy of the whole and relates with the whole. In the Jungian framework all is purposeful and has a meaning and the identified problem rests in that consciousness does not have a view of the whole, and is thus unable to understand this purpose and meaning.

Mindell (1987) writes that some separations and divorces take place due to the inability of the partners to process the tension occurring during the individuation processes of one or both of them in the context of their relationship. When people separate for this reason, often the same cycle will be recreated with the next partner(s) with the pattern of dropping and beginning relationships often accompanied with feelings of depression and hopelessness.

We thus try to feel completed through the experience of a person carrying something secondary to us according to Process Work. That means that we choose a partner who is in contact, who identifies with characteristics, attitudes or behaviors which we have marginalized. In most cases we have no awareness of the existence of marginalized parts nor of the deep need of our big self to bring them into light. Acquiring awareness and expanding

ourselves in order to include our marginalized parts - the individuation process – is not an easy thing to do. On the contrary, it demands time, effort, energy and at times is a very painful process for the individual and/or the couple.

In addition, Process Work considers that couples, families, and groups have a myth behind them and that myth dreams up people to come together (Dworkin, 2019). Jung (1989), had consistently observed that a mythical personal pattern, an inner tendency was appearing in the childhood dreams of people and he called that pattern “life myth”. Taking that mythic principle into the relationship realm, Mindell writes that,

“a creative, un-lived, unusual and mythical part in each individual which she or he has difficulty to support and which finds understanding, recognition and appreciation in the new partner”
(Mindell, 1987, p.89).

Taking the idea of a relationship myth further the concept of self-actualization, it is important to be aware of the inability for a couple to understand, connect with and live their myth, and how this inability can make people part from a relationship but then, may reunite them over and over while the mythic level of relationship tries to consciously manifest. On the other hand, Mindell writes that living a myth that doesn’t belong to an individual or relationship and staying in a relationship because of the *inability to part*, may give rise to psychosomatic reactions and in some extreme cases even to terminal illness as an unconscious chance to leave the imprisoning relationship (ibid., 1987).

The concepts found in analytic thinking and theories such as of shared fantasy, of a couples’ state of mind, of thirdness in a relationship all direct us in the reality of the relationship being an autonomous entity bigger than the sum of the two partners. In the language of quantum physics this autonomous entity is a field (Mindell, 1995), and in relationship it is the field that

the two people create. As in quantum physics, this field organizes and structures the relationship between the two or more individuals.

Process Work studies and works with this third, what might be called the “transpersonal” level focusing on the unified field in the background of the relationships. The work explores the dreaming underlying the relationship, its deeper essence which results from the high dreams and the atmospheres of the two partners but is larger than the two of them (Dworkin, 2019; Processwork Hub, 2016). This background dreaming has its own unique wisdom and likewise each relationship will have each own myth. This common myth or dreaming creates a pattern, a tendency, a potential which holds a transpersonal form in the relationship. Just as the personal myth is typically unconscious to the individual, so is this shared myth an unconscious side of the relationship. To discover a relationship myth, the seed can be traced to the first common memory of the two partners, or dreams that were had in the early days of the relationship. The relationship myth is related to the personal growth of both partners, the growth of the couple as an entity and the life of the couple in the world and for the world (i.e., the relationship as a channel for the greater field). When the couple does not live according to their relationship myth, edges will “take over” and the relationship may become experienced and expressed with boredom and conflict.

Mindell (1987) noted that further to their underlying myth, each couple or family has its own primary process, all the “we” statements, a combination of their intentions and identities which form something like a group “ego”. However, the couples or families are rarely fully aware even of their primary process and the therapist should first acknowledge the importance of togetherness, respect the primary identity of the system and its edges, before assisting the couple to explore and welcome the unknown secondary processes in themselves and the relationship as well as the myth of their relationship.

Stages in a Relationship according to Process Work

The beginning of a relationship can often be experienced as a kind of heaven on earth. As Mindell writes.

".. powerful attractions arise during this phase by either consciously or unconsciously integrating the other thus feeling complete internally and externally" (1987, p. 92).

In this *honeymoon* phase each partner undertakes a role in the relationship, and edges are formed to prevent role switching and thus continue the homeostatic functioning of the relationship, family, group or society. When these roles are fulfilled, negativity, aggression and unhappiness drop away from awareness and reappear in dream figures and double signals. The edges formed become, in some cases, social and cultural laws as in marital contracts.

Edges, and even laws, create homeostasis in an attempt to maintain an accepted harmony. At some point however in the couple's evolution the drive for transformation, process and individual change resists the roles supported by the primary process and uncomfortable, disturbing double signals begin to surface. Boredom and irritation might start ruining the harmony. In this phase the recognition of annoying and irritating characteristics of each other is usually attributed to the confines of married or monogamous life together (*ibid.*, 1987).

Cumulative irritations in a relationship will produce a crisis at some point. For example, the need of a partner to follow one's personal needs and process breaks the primary idea of peace and harmony, so the other partner responds with rage against the threatening dissolution. At this point, the first partner's drive for individuation might be still quite unconscious so s/he cannot understand the other's rage. Neither can identify with their secondary processes so they cannot accept the accusations they receive from the other. So, they may start making accusations against each other and a communication crisis arises with neither able to pick up or comprehend what the other is suggesting, and trust begins to wear off. Couples that do not

bare the tension of the battle might switch or drop partners, falsely believing that staying alone or changing partner will bring back a permanent state of harmony. However, Mindell (1987) explains that a process manifesting at any moment contains the wisdom of the path of each individual and their relationship. A therapist thus needs to help people learn how to make use of the attacks and accusations as a way to coming close to their feelings, standing up for their needs and allowing their personal and the relationship's development. The greatest relief in a couple happens when both parties go over their personal edge.

The Tao in relationships

Taoism has often been described as the philosophy of nature. Living close to the earth one sees the wisdom of not interfering with the course of life, and of letting things go their way. This is the wisdom that also tells us not to get in our own way, and to paddle with the current, split wood along the grain, and seek to understand the inner workings of our nature instead of trying to change it. (Watts, 2000, pxvii).

Letting the process, or in other words letting the Tao, govern a relationship means having courage and discipline to having signal awareness. So, when in a relationship crisis, instead of holding your position and defending your right and your opinion, you become aware of your and your partner's process, your shared Tao or flow together. An attitude that values process empowers us to be unhappy when we feel so, to follow our jealousy, to stay with our hurt and pain, to express our fear of not being loved when feel hopeless, to show affection when feel loving, to even demand our personal need like a dictator would do instead of trying to be democratic but to do so consciously! Relating with ourselves and the other is hard, but following the process in relationships marks a simultaneous initiation of two (or more) people into the essence of life (Mindell, 1987).

ADULT LEARNING

Adult Learning Theories

Since the 1960's several theories on adult learning have been formed. Malcolm Knowles (1984) theory of Andragogy dating back to 1970's, which is still the most prominent model of adult learning, placed a set of assumptions on the learning process of adults in relation to non-adults. These are: (a) changes in self-concept — the assumption that as a person grows and matures, his or her self-concept moves from one of total dependency to one of increasing self-directedness; (b) the role of experience — the assumption that as an individual matures, he or she accumulates an expanding reservoir of experiences that cause him or her to become an increasingly rich resource for learning and creates a broad base on which to relate new learning; (c) readiness to learn — the assumption that as an individual matures, his or her readiness to learn is decreasingly the product of his or her biological development and academic pressure and is increasingly the product of the tasks required for his or her evolving social roles; (d) orientation to learning — the assumption that children have been conditioned to have a subject-centered orientation to learning, while adults tend to have a problem-centered orientation to learning; and (e) motivation to learn is intrinsic rather than extrinsic (Taylor & Hamdy, 2013).

In 1963 McClusky presented his theory of margin. The theory is based on the premise that an adult's life is full of growth, change, and integration. Because of this growth, an adult is constantly seeking to reach a balance between the amount of energy needed and the amount of power available to manage life. If one has more power than load, one is able to negotiate or handle the issues or problems natural to one's life. Conversely, if load is greater than power, then one has diminished capacity to handle the problems or issues. Adults need therefore learning that increases their power without increasing their load (cost and time effective, followed at their pace, etc) (ibid., 2013).

British researcher and teacher, Peter Jarvis, introduced in 1987 an adult learning model based around experience. He posited that all learning begins with experience and more particularly, social experience. Some of these experiences are repeated often enough that they become routine and therefore do not lead to learning. Other experiences are so “out of the norm” that prior learning methods no longer work with the situation. This new experience causes a person to reassess, rethink, or create a new plan for how to act or what to do (Western Governor University, 2020).

Affective learning outcomes involve attitudes, motivation, and values. As can be seen from previous discussions and the amount of research available, the cognitive approach to education has been the focus of much research. Hence, it appears much emphasis has been put forward asserting the best way to get to the affective domain is through the cognitive domain. Once a student has achieved “cognition,” it is assumed that the student will then apply the knowledge and, by process, have a change in attitude or be “affected” (Maxfield, 2009).

It is therefore important for anyone teaching adult learners to create a learning environment that is comfortable and non-threatening, is designed around learner’s needs, builds and enhances learner’s self-esteem, encourages active and self-directed participation, acknowledges and utilizes learners’ past experiences, allows learners to monitor progress towards set objectives and most important of all, promotes critical thinking.

On the other hand, education is both a personal and public learning experience. Therefore, the challenge of educators is to create communities of learning and inquiry that integrate the cognitive, social and teaching presence to meet individual and societal needs (Taylor & Hamdy, 2013).

III. Approach

My approach to this project could be examined in two sections: The bibliographical research and the steps followed throughout the project development.

Bibliographical Research & Steps followed

While writing the proposal of this project I started my reading on theories around relationships, including Process Work's approach on relationships, on Process Work theory in general and on learning. I gradually over a period of almost one year, from May 2020 till March 2021, continued reading either exclusively - till January 2021 when I started the writing phase of the project - or parallel to the writing. Although my reading research is far from exhaustive, I managed to go deeper into the world of relationships with the focus being on couple relationships and romantic love. From each book, paper or article read I was keeping notes around those parts that seemed to me more relative to my project. I ended up with hundreds of pages of pages of hand-written notes which I read for a second time in order to start making connections among all this material. At a second phase I assorted the material I would use for the development of the seminar and the one for the contextual essay, although in some cases this overlapped.

I had decided that my manual would follow the three levels of relationship as proposed in Process Work theory and practice – the intrapersonal, the interpersonal and the field. Just before summer 2020 my therapist proposed me to buy Jan Dworkin's book "Make Love Better" (Dworkin, 2019), as it was exactly on my topic. After reading Jan's book I decided to follow her general outline for the manual (more or less) given that some of the topics could be examined in more than one of the levels of relationships (i.e., power, moods, edges, etc.) which was rather confusing for me. I wanted to start on the safe side, meaning to step on the categorization already existing by an experienced process worker and teacher. I put down my

workshop's outline and started working on the material. I soon understood that the length and depth of the material was too much for a single manual. I discussed this issue with my advisor and we decided that it would be more effective for any future learner to split the material (theory and exercises) in three – one for each level of relationships. Quite soon after that I also realized that the development of all three manuals plus the contextual essay was too much work to the given time frame, and after a week of extreme stress and symptoms I decided to deliver the first part and the contextual essay for the demands of the final project.

Exercises

For each section of my outline, I checked the available exercises offered in Dworkin's book and in the material of our training in Greece provided by Processwork Hub in Athens. I picked each time the one that I felt closer to the material of the section and then worked on simplifying it or making its steps more analytic so as any person, with no prior experience to process work or any other form of psychotherapy or facilitation, to be able to follow the steps.

IV. Learning

Edges

Before starting to work on the final project, I had a beautiful high dream of creating a project, which would contribute to process work development and community but also to opening a path for me as a writer (at my first version of F.P.) and educator. I was seeing the final project as a positive challenge that I could manage with relevant ease.

Since I started working on it however my edges appeared.

At the start by underestimating the time and personal resources available and thinking too big. Or too big for my primary process and everyday life, I hit edges. Inner authority and self-worth were the main edges I encountered during the whole process of the final project and I have been challenged since, in all possible ways. Those years have been immensely difficult for me in both outer and inner terms.

I started with the intention to write two chapters of a Process Work textbook in Greek (the high dream said "I will write the whole book soon after"), then Covid-19 appeared in our lives and my experience on a voluntary hotline made me change my thought and rewrite my final project proposal around the creation of an asynchronous distance education program/workshop on relationships so I started working on this end, which finally ended up to be an educational manual which at some point may be also linked to a workshop.

The critic giving voice to my edges was saying: "Who are you to be the first to create a textbook in the Greek language or take the role of the educator/teacher of Process Work theory or practice? You are just a student. Let others who really know to do the job right!"

Something in me was resisting this critic and that something is, I believe, my wish and motive to do something for the people around me, the world I am living in, however this critic has managed at times to poison my self-worth and sense of authority.

I ended up deciding to go on with the third idea, creating a manual on relationships, and edge work started appearing on the relationship channel.

While writing the project material the critic was voiced by one of my teachers in a meeting of the cohort for the final project and then to my relationship with my advisor with whom we finally, after working our relationship alone and with a facilitator, decided to break our cooperation and I continued with another advisor. I was on both occasions pushed over my edge to stand for myself and for what I was doing. However precious energy and longtime were consumed there, especially in the advisor case, which left me drained and unwilling to continue the project for some months.

The project is about intimate relationships and there was the most important and repetitive challenge for me. The first summer, 2020, after the first lockdown for the pandemic and while Greece was on war atmosphere due to Turkey's threats, my ex-partner – who I love deeply and with whom I had recently broken – experienced a psychotic episode while staying at my home for a few days. I took him through all the phases of the episode until he was able to function again in his everyday life. On the progress exams on September I was exhausted and ready to collapse. Next spring and summer, 2021, after repetitive lockdowns and immense isolation and loneliness and huge pressure from the training program, I had two consequent relationship attempts which failed as both men were too absorbed into their inner processes and unable to open up and relate with me the ways that I hoped for and needed. And after some months a third attempt, a relationship with a man I fell deeply in love with and which ended 8 months later as he also was too much into his more self-absorbed and narcissistic way of being, unavailable for closeness, commitment, love. Parallel to this last relationship I

faced a threatening experience to my health, stayed one month in the hospital fighting for my life and my vital organs and now, 6 months later, end September 2022 I am still trying to come back to my feet and regain my health step by step and recover psychologically from all these cumulative pains.

My own trauma experiences and repetitive patterns, and the absence of inner authority and self-worth were fully in action in all the cases. My inner child longing for love, security and sweetness in life is ready to give “earth and water” to the beloved one, but is unable to give so to my own self, has great difficulty to make clear its own needs and wishes, to put boundaries, to get into conflict, to say “Listen, this is me, that’s my way, that’s what I want”. My fears of abandonment and of rejection play underneath relationships both the intimate ones and the ones with higher rank figures (like the teacher or the advisor).

The fierce need of a break out of all inner and outer confinements, to free myself – from patterns, lack of self-worth and sense of authority, fears, overthinking and over-analyzing – appears to be the ultimate lesson for me arising from relationship and symptom work. The final project path brought me in front my life myth (childhood dream): letting the “weak mother” leave, becoming aware and working on integrating the extreme spirit of strength and determination in me (the werewolf). But not using them to (only) deal with difficulties and adversities of life, to come back to light from darkness, but to use it creatively in truly and fully respecting, valuing and following myself – dreams, needs, wishes, and life path.

Edge on filming myself

I have always been introverted and shy. I have always felt uncomfortable when others were taking pictures of me, or if I had to speak in front of public. I however decided, at first, to do a project that demanded to film myself and upload the videos on an internet platform. I did all the preparation work: I searched for platforms and found the best possible for my project, I

found collaborators (a cameraman, a person to do the direction and a specialist in montage) in order to do a professional work but as the time was passing, I realized two things were really hard for me: 1. To create an oral, speaking material and 2. To be filmed.

Watching all this struggle from a distance I feel exhausted and proud. For the growth I have achieved so far, for my warriorship and inner strength to go down in darkness, physically and psychologically, and come back to light wounded but alive and with a deep wish to continue growing.

Learning from creating the manual

I had never before tried to create a manual. Searching on the internet for educational manuals available or asking people who have already created one to hand it to me as a guide, I came across the fantastic work of individuals or organizations around several issues. I only then realized how important is to create and offer (for free or with rights) this kind of work to others. It takes time, will and effort to put together theory, exercises and advice to educators/facilitators or end users around an issue and it's a huge privilege to take something ready in your hands.

I saw different approaches on design and presentation, I learned what the major and important ingredients of a manual are and tried to incorporate this learning in the creation of my own with the best quality standards I could at the moment. As in all things repetition is a teacher and I look forward for the evaluation of my educational manual from my advisor and study committee and most importantly from its future users – I do hope people will use it – in order to understand its shortages and become better in any needed way in the next one or many next.

While creating the manual I also had the opportunity to own more the material. Although I had already written more than half of it, I could now see better what the outline is that I need to follow, what to say and what not and on which way, and to let myself express more freely with my very own voice.

V. Evaluation and Concerns

The product of this final project, the educational manual on intimate relationships, has not been used yet and thus has not been evaluated. Its evaluation is left in abeyance although is of major importance in order to incorporate feedback from both the facilitators that will use it and the participants.

A second issue concerning evaluation is that the intention and initial idea of an education on relationships was including all the three levels of relationships – intra, inter and transpersonal – however for the time being only the introduction and the first level is addressed. It is important that participants will eventually have the opportunity to explore relationships in all the learning spectrum in order to be able to evaluate if, how much, and in what ways their understanding, awareness and behavior has been changed towards a personal growth path.

VI. Contributions to Process Work

The understanding of our peoples' difficulty in forming and keeping meaningful intimate relationships in our lives, has become apparent to me through many sources: my personal difficulty, my friends', my family members', my therapy clients' and even strangers that I happen to hear or see in the next building from my home, on the street or the beach or actually anywhere. I am a very observant person and I also have the ability to grasp atmospheres, moods, and the field.

Something pushes me to do something about it. I want to help all of us, to be able to have more positive and meaningful experiences in our relating and to achieve growth and joy through them. Bringing together the existing knowledge around relating, and the theory and techniques of Process Work in a manual is a step towards my dreaming and the opening up of Process Work to more and more people out there. Process workers or other facilitators may be more willing to decide on the implementation of an experiential workshop (or a series of them) on relationships if they have a manual that is easy to understand and use in their hands. They may feel more secure, better prepared thus less reluctant to organize and run it. They will save serious time and effort and will be able to step on the material provided in order to build their own approach on the training process.

Opening up Process Work to the world, to me means opening up a hand to people. This project is a small hand.

Conclusion

The world of relationships, their difficulty and their beauty, their many levels with all aspects interfering and affecting relating, their reality and dreaming as a channel of human experience and personal growth, is fascinating.

Working on this project was a deeper diving in this world for me, trying to explore, understand and get closer with the intricate and surprising substances of this world. What I already know for sure is that for me that was the beginning. As a person, relating is the issue I wish to emphasize in both my innerwork and my therapy from now on. As a therapist, I know I have a long way in gradually learning to better and better understand and facilitate the relationships of couples who come to me asking for my help. As an educator, this was a small step in my apprenticeship path.

I hope that my dive and what came out of it as a final product of it to be useful for facilitators and people who wish and need to make a relevant dive in this world. I imagine this world as an infinite sea but yet so welcoming, so pure and so full of surprising learning

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