



1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. (2 CE credits)

TH8 “Psychodynamic Use of Mindfulness in Couples Therapy” presented by Rob Fisher, MA, LMFT

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EXTERNALLY FOCUSSED MINDFULNESS IN COUPLES THERAPY

Rob Fisher, MFT



Doorway to the Unconscious

- ▣ Every element you track is connected to unconscious models of the self, world and others.



Psychotherapy is the study of the organization of experience



- ▣ “To a lover a beautiful woman is a delight, to a monk, a distraction, to a mosquito, a good meal” – Zen saying



Externally Oriented Mindfulness

- ▣ Three elements:
 - What they are doing now
 - How they do it
 - What they are experiencing in the present moment

Physical Elements

- ▣ **Movement**
- ▣ **Eyes**
- ▣ **Feelings**
- ▣ **Gestures**
- ▣ **Posture**
- ▣ **Pace**



Externally Oriented Mindfulness

- ▣ **Voice quality**
- ▣ **Transitions**
- ▣ **Energy**
- ▣ **Presence**



Systems

- ▣ **System**
- ▣ **Transference with each other**
- ▣ **How they are evoking partner's reactions**
- ▣ **Defenses**



Attachment

- ▣ **Attachment issues**
 - **Abandonment**
 - **Engulfment**



Internally Oriented Mindfulness

▣ Counter-transference



How do you feel about each partner here?

Presence of early injuries

▣ Childhood Wounds



Dysregulation

- ▣ Physiological dysregulation



- ▣ and coregulation



Communication Skills

- ▣ “I” messages
- ▣ Blame
- ▣ Scheduling
- ▣ Appreciations
- ▣ Listening Skills:
needs and feelings

Beliefs

- ▣ I am unsafe
- ▣ My needs won't be taken seriously
- ▣ I can't have any needs
- ▣ My vulnerability needs to be hidden
- ▣ My own direction won't be supported
- ▣ I have to prove my value
- ▣ I have to effort to be heard and seen
- ▣ Etc.

Character Predispositions

- ▣ Withdraw
- ▣ Collapse
- ▣ Self Rely
- ▣ Deceive
- ▣ Resist
- ▣ Produce
- ▣ Attract attention

Boundaries and Differentiation

- ▣ Boundaries:
 - Overly Permeable
 - Overly Rigid
- ▣ Differentiation:
 - while in contact with other

Cultural Differences

- ▣ Expectations
- ▣ Parenting practices
- ▣ Rules
- ▣ Roles
- ▣ Feelings about the other culture
- ▣ Family prejudice
- ▣ Effect of broader societal prejudice



Resources

- ▣ Missing experiences
- ▣ Resources



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Use of Mindfulness in Couples Therapy

Benefits of Mindfulness

- ▣ Noticing sensation and emotions in slowed down way brings down the amygdala's alarm response, and increases prefrontal brain activity.



What is Mindfulness

- ▣ Paying attention to the present moment
- ▣ Without judgment
- ▣ Without preference
- ▣ Self observation of internal experience
- ▣ Slowing down to notice the details



What is the Purpose of Using Mindfulness

- ▣ Slows couples down
- ▣ Increases responsibility
- ▣ Enhances self discovery/empowerment
- ▣ Exponentially more information becomes available



How to Evoke Mindfulness

- ▣ Only in an atmosphere of safety and acceptance
- ▣ Explain it
- ▣ In order to go faster we go slower
- ▣ Use a soft voice
- ▣ Use simple, precise short sentences



How to Evoke Mindfulness

Say things like:

- ▣ Bring you focus inwards
- ▣ Just notice...
- ▣ You don't have to do anything
- ▣ Lets slow down
- ▣ Notice anything that goes on in your experience



How to Invoke Mindfulness

- ▣ It could be a thought, image, sensation, feeling
- ▣ No right or wrong, good or bad
- ▣ Notice without judging or trying to change it
- ▣ Let yourself be curious about it
- ▣ Pay attention to your internal landscape
- ▣ Notice what wants to be invited in this moment



Psychotherapeutic Benefits of Mindfulness

- Personal experience is organized by implicit memory and knowledge about relationships, bonding and emotions.
- Implicit memory includes the rules of life, like the rules of grammar. It is unconscious, but dictates how one acts.
- Mindfulness accesses the parts of the brain in which implicit memory is stored - limbic system

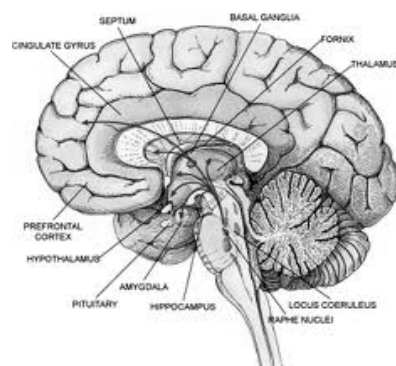


Benefits of Mindfulness

- ▣ Mindfulness increases relaxation response including
 - Increase in melatonin and serotonin
 - Decrease in cortisol, heart and breathing rate, feelings of pain (36% lower use of pain medication)



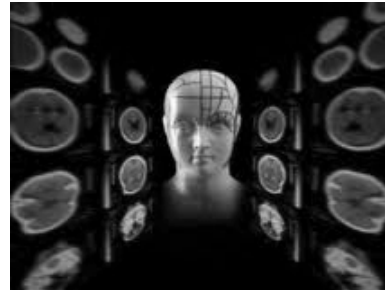
Neuroscience Research on Mindfulness



- ▣ Same neural circuitry that governs relational attunement governs mindfulness.
- ▣ Mindfulness increases emotional regulation and regulation of attention.
- ▣ Mindful awareness focuses attention and stimulates middle prefrontal cortex and promotes integration.

Neuroscience Research on Mindfulness

- ▣ Prefrontal Cortex: regulates emotion, processes rewards and motivation.
- ▣ Prefrontal Cortex builds connections, engages axonal fibers they grow links to other regions -cortex, limbic areas and brainstem such as:
 - Hippocampus: Memory Processing
 - Subiculum: Distinguishes danger vs. reward situation
 - Amygdala: Attaches emotional significance to sensory input. Mindfulness reduces activity in it



Psychotherapeutic Benefits of Mindfulness

▣ Why it is important:

- Mindfulness works with live experience allowing new neural networks to develop as opposed to simple conversation which affects only the more linear and language based parts of the brain.

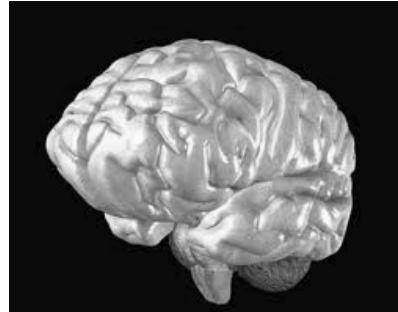


Neuroscience Research on Mindfulness

- ▣ There are the nine prefrontal cortex functions impacted by mindfulness. *

- Attuned communication
- Emotional balance
- Body regulation
- Response Flexibility
- Empathy
- Self-knowing Awareness
- Fear Modulation
- Intuition
- Morality

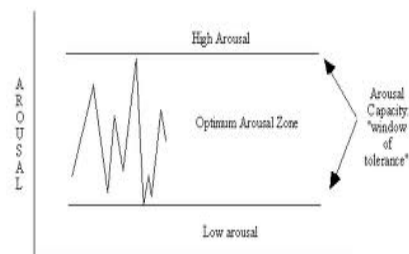
- ▣ * Dan Siegel, MD



Neuroscience Research on Mindfulness

- ▣ Zone of Tolerance

- The zone of tolerance between hyper-arousal (overly sympathetic activity) and hypo-arousal (overly parasympathetic activity) expands, creating less fight or flight. Good for couples!



How to Evoke Mindfulness

- ▣ Allow for the client to deepen, not something to “happen”
- ▣ Constantly track how turned inward the client is
- ▣ Report back from within mindfulness



***Mindfulness Based
Experiential Psychotherapy
with Couples
(CAMFT - 2015)***

Rob Fisher, MFT

wildtemple@aol.com

www.robfishermft.com

TRACKING THE NON-VERBAL WITH COUPLES

Beliefs: What beliefs and assumptions do they make about self, the partner and life that are limiting? Listen for phrases that sound like a belief such as: “So, I wasn’t going to ask him to do anything for me”, or “It just didn’t occur to me to ask her to listen” or “If I say that then I might get blasted”.

Gestures: Repetitive movements made during the discussion of a certain topic.

Feelings: Emotions, longings, etc.

Presence: Are they listening? How’s the eye contact? Do they respond to what you or their partner says?

Aliveness: How alive, vibrant, do they appear? What is their quality of energy?

Memories: Is the speaker referring to something in either the immediate past or the distant-childhood past. Is there longing and other emotions being expressed in their face, bodies and/or tone of voice?

Strengths: How is their ability to negotiate, their ability to acknowledge each other. Is there a sense of team work, a sense of affection? Are they able to acknowledge when something works and doesn’t work? How do their strengths and weaknesses interact with each other?

Posture: Upright or slouched? Posture in relation to the other? Expansive/contained?

Pace: Speedy to slow? Tentative, forceful? Discrepancies in pace.

Boundaries :Over or under boundaried? Beliefs around boundaries and entitlement. Do they fail to acknowledge a boundary that has been set? Do they rebel against boundaries that are trying to be set? How about their intellectual and spiritual boundaries?

Body: Do they seem plastered together on the couch? Does one reach into the other person’s space without checking first? Do they seem physically defensive around each other:(holding their bodies away from the other)?

Speech: Do they talk over each other? Do they discount what the other says?

Problem maintaining solutions: Watch how they try to solve the problem. What tools do they use: arguing, blaming, guilt, silence?

Interaction of character strategies: When is one partner’s strategy hooking the other

partner's strategy? For instance: a tough/generous strategy interacting with an oral/masochistic strategy. Circular repetitive patterns.

Transference with you: Who are they making you out to be: The judge? The parent? The problem? The boss? the expert? How do they relate to you?

Transference with each other: What themes do you see them projecting on to each other? Do they mention one reminding the other of a relative, school teacher or close family associate?

Countertransference: Do you like these people? Are you intimidated by both or one of them? Do you want them to like you? Do you feel pressured? Do you feel bored, bothered, careful, overwhelmed, sad, happy, paternal, maternal, like an authority, small, welcomed, safe?

How they are evoking partners reactions: By fighting? Shutting down? Demanding? Avoiding? Seducing/manipulating? Being polite and compassionate?

Non-egocentric nourishment: What things are enjoyable about them simply because of it's existence not because of anything any they did? Is it the way they try, or the innocence in their faces? The genuineness of their feelings or their ability to take risks? Their essential self?

Defenses: How does each person defend self – attacking, withdrawing, intellectualizing, projecting badness on other, etc.

Attachment: Are they moving towards or away?

Issues of freedom, security, intimacy

Power : Awareness of impact, leadership, dependence

Communication skills: I messages, one topic at a time, reflective listening, etc.

Physiological dysregulation and coregulation: Agitation, eye rolling, breathing, flushing, etc.

Punishment and rewards : How do they reward or punish each other? Does it work?

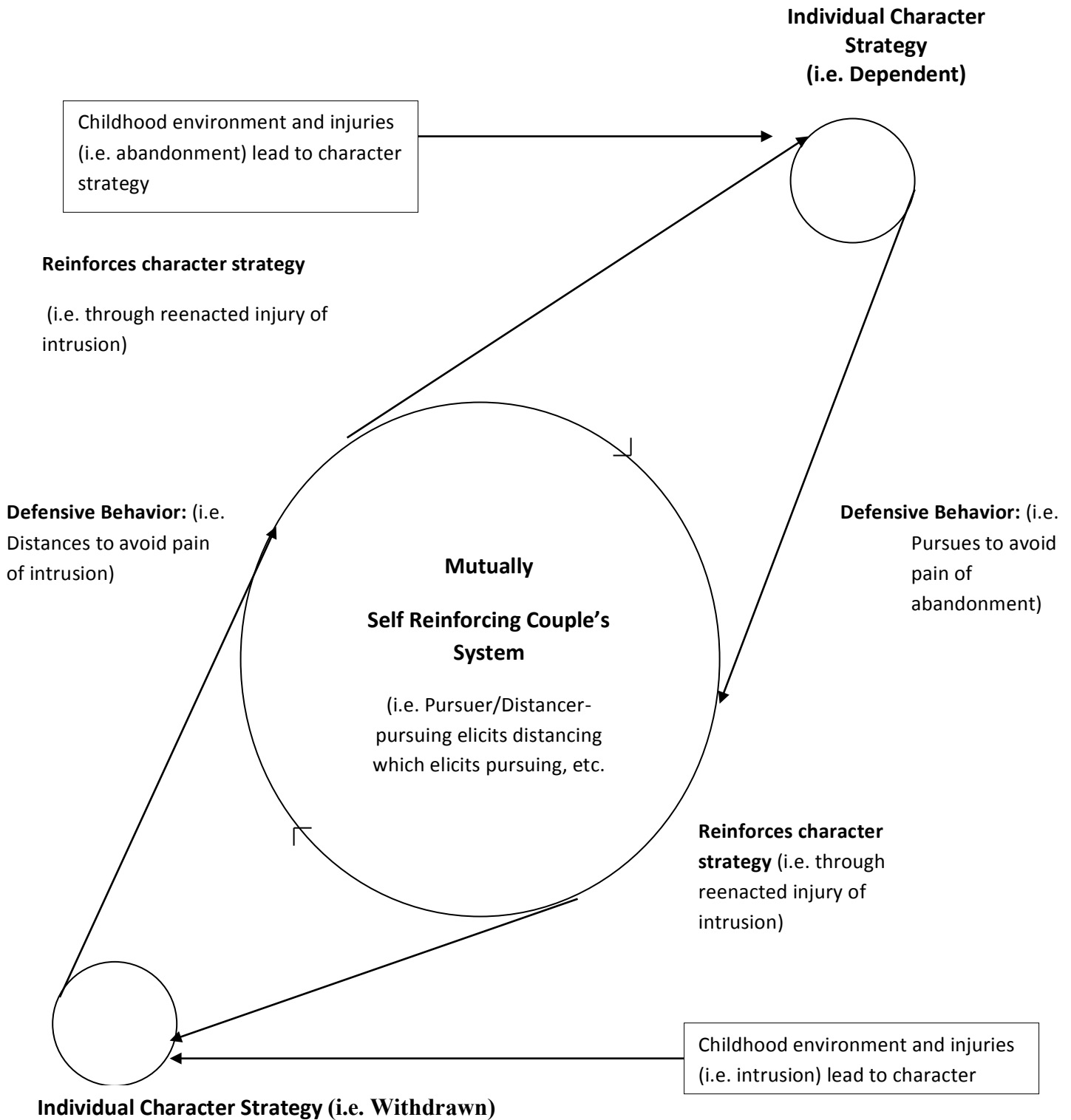
System: What roles do they embody? How do these work circularly

Resources: Moments of kindness, generosity, gentleness, good listening, self disclosure, humor, courage, etc.

Wounds: What early wounds underlie their roles and difficult interactions? Do they speak of these?

Missing experiences: What experiences should they have had as a child – safety, attention, appreciation, support for individuality, etc. that were missed and now sought from partner.

COUPLES SYSTEMS



From Insight to Experience - An Experiential Approach to Couples Therapy

By Rob Fisher, M.F.T.

Introduction: Think about it... Which would have more impact on you, watching National Geographic on TV or going to Africa and smelling the heat of the rhinoceros as it paws the dust in front of your jeep? Which would be more rewarding, discussing chocolate cake with a friend or eating it (non-caloric of course!)? Which is more pleasurable - talking about sex or having it? If it is true that experience has exponentially more impact than does verbal discussion, then why do we so often conduct psychotherapy as a form of expensive conversation?

Psychotherapy is often practiced as an **in vitro** exploration of a person's or a couples' life. While this is an interesting pursuit, it often lacks depth and aliveness, not to mention brevity.

This is an article about **in vivo** psychotherapy, about how to bring therapy alive for client and therapist alike. It is dedicated to the premise that people want not just insight about what is going on in their internal worlds, but the opportunity to experience something different. It is dedicated to the idea that you can obtain more information about a psychological phenomenon by exploring it as it is happening than by discussing it as a report after the fact.

More specifically, this article is designed to introduce the reader to somatic and experiential interventions in couples psychotherapy. Many of these interventions can be used regardless of your theoretical orientation. They provide an opportunity to elegantly access, explore and change systemic and characterological material in a time effective and non-intrusive fashion. I will present both theory as well as examples of how the concepts may be immediately applied in your clinical practice.

Clinical Example: Jack's complaint about Betsy was that she was too emotionally volatile and prone to verbal and physical violence when angry. Betsy's complaint about Jack was that he was unavailable emotionally. From a somatic point of view, one interesting thing about Jack was the way in which he held his head - high on his shoulders, with his back very straight and the chin tilted up about two inches. I had some guesses about what was encoded in the posture, but my preference was to have him find out from the inside rather than my interpreting it from the outside. I would rather be a midwife for his deepening consciousness about himself than an authority who tells him who he is.

I said: "How about a little experiment?" They both said "O.K.". I then asked Jack to take a moment to go inside to a mindful, observant state and then to drop his chin about two inches and notice what came up - feelings, thoughts, images, memories, sensations or nothing at all. After sitting this way for a few moments he said: "I feel less powerful." I next asked him to raise his chin about three inches and for Betsy to notice how it affected her. She said, "Its amazing, because its such a little thing, but I go into a rage." I asked him to lower his chin again to see what that elicited from her. She said that he felt available to her and that he had a pleading look that made her want to gently take care of him.

This powerful somatic signal had a constant presence and effect in and on their relationship. Whatever content they might discuss, his posture and her reaction to it was part of the background ambiance in which their conversations took place. It colored the emotional climate of the relationship and predicted certain patterns of interaction.

Raising and lowering of his chin was an access route to significant intrapsychic processes for each of them as well as a circular systemic process in which his withdrawal elicited her rage, which in turn elicited his withdrawal. Continuing with this process (accessing core material through the body) involved having him explore from the inside his characterological organization which prompted him to hold his chin “above it all”. This kind of exploration is not talking about his character and defenses; it involves experiencing them from the inside. His physical organization around his chin also served as a trigger for her and enabled us to explore her object representations relating to an unavailable intimate partner. Again, we did not talk about her history as much as we had her study from the inside what happened internally when he raised his chin. A stream of memories, feelings and meaning became available to her in a connected, vital fashion. Together they were able to develop a visceral sense of the pattern along with its automaticity and circularity, which helped them make some conscious decisions and choices regarding its continuation.

It also provided them with the opportunity to explore new patterns of interaction; to face the fears associated with them as well as to experience their benefits.

Benefits of a Somatic Approach: People are holographic. Their internal organization is reflected in their every act, movement, tension, from their tone of voice when they call you on the phone, to the speed by which they transport their body across your office, to the amount of eye contact they maintain with their partner, to the relative positioning of their bodies. Somatic signals are a powerful commentary on the couples’ internal organization and can provide a quick and accurate diagnosis of a couple's dynamics.

The most effective way to access the past is through the present.

By noticing and working with proprioceptive signals, body tensions, posture, gestures, energy and presence, a skilled practitioner will have immediate opportunities to help a couple recognize and reorganize the dynamics of their relationship.

For example, whenever Helen entered the office with her husband, Henry, the first thing she did was to grab a pillow and hold it tightly covering the middle part of her body. This was a prominent and clear signal. As a therapist I could guess, or interpret what this meant, but that would simply interfere with her own ability to access the meaning of her actions. I proposed an experiment whereby she could sense the difference in her body with and without the pillow. She saw how she relied only on herself to provide safety and comfort and shut her husband out from this potentially nourishing interaction, while complaining that he was never available. We then experimented with what it was like to have him gently hold the symbolic pillow for her against her body. He took over from her the soothing function it provided, and gave her the opportunity to press her limits of accepting care and contact. She noticed how much she resisted this, and he noticed how much he liked feeling useful to her. This gave them a new basis to examine an old problem as well as redefinition its causes.

*People are holographic.
Their internal organization
is reflected in their every act.*

Working With the Present: One of the keys to working somatically is to pay close attention to, and acknowledge the moment by moment internal experience of the client. The most effective way to access the past is through the present. By working with the present, characterological organization can be addressed, studied, felt, clarified, as well as new options explored in an immediate and undeniable way. This approach has the power of immediacy. As a therapist, you have the opportunity of working with wet clay, as opposed to hearing about clay that has already solidified sometime during the week. If asked to describe the lines in your hand from memory you would be far less capable than if you are looking at your

hand as you speak. Psychological phenomena and couples dynamics can be most effectively worked with in the present.

It is also important to pay particular attention to the process that is occurring in front of you and not become entranced by the content of the conversation.

Cynthia and her husband Ron came in to my office. She began to speak immediately and didn't stop until I interrupted. She spoke without punctuation - no commas or periods. One long, desperate run on sentence. The content did not speak nearly as loudly as the presentation. When she took a shallow breath, I inserted: "You feel really fast inside, huh?" She calmed down a notch upon being seen a bit. I took this as a sign that I was on the right track and said, "Let's have Ron say something to you and you notice what happens inside - feelings, sensations, images, memories, anything. Would that be O.K.?" She said, "Yes. Then I instructed him to say, "I hear you and I see you." (Histrionic personality styles are often based on early injuries of not being seen and heard by the significant others in the child's world.) She sat there, quiet for the first time in the session, tears rolling down her cheeks. Finally she said, "That's what I have been waiting to hear from you all these years. " I had simply contacted her pace, energy level and quality of physical movement.

In a desperate attempt to gain his attention, she talked so fast and so much that she alienated him. The faster she talked, the more disengaged and glazed over he became. This kind of mutually reinforcing circular pattern is common in couples. I wanted to interrupt it, as well as address the wound she carried and how it functioned in the relationship. By noticing and commenting on her pace, I was able to access a significant intrapsychic injury and an interactional pattern based on it. This helped the couple to develop a new and more satisfying way of relating.

Contraindications: Working somatically tends to uncover deep material more rapidly than many traditional therapies. It is therefore very important to ask permission prior to potentially invasive procedures and to track carefully the effects of any intervention.

It is also inadvisable to work with clients in this fashion who have very rigid personality structures, borderline issues, or strong expectations of therapy involving talk only. In situations such as these it is best to use somatic signals for diagnostic purposes and only use the mildest form of interventions.

Mindfulness: In order to work somatically, to access deeper levels of internal organization, and to avoid the liability of psychological invasion, it is important to enlist the assistance of the client's observing ego in a state that can be called "mindfulness". This is based on the premise that if you are driving down the freeway at 70 miles per hour, it is unlikely that you will notice the smell of the flowers by the roadside. When one slows down and becomes aware of the minute-by-minute flow of internal experience, one begins to notice the core beliefs, feelings and characterological strategies that determine the kind of life that one experiences.

For instance, a couple came in and the wife complained that her husband was unavailable. While she looked at him, her whole body was turned away from him. As she slowly turned to face him, she found herself uneasy about performance and dependency issues. Studying her posture in mindfulness enabled her to stop blaming him and to notice that she was also ambivalent about intimacy and found it easier to blame him rather than to face her internal conflicts about it.

Mindfulness is a lot like slow motion. It allows one to notice what was previously unconscious. Couples can become upset, emotionally volatile and begin to blame each other in a session. This is usually not very therapeutic unless they have previously been highly disengaged; in which case it represents the beginnings of reengagement. If, however, mutual blaming and uncontrolled feelings threaten to take over

a session, I generally ask the couple to slow down " as I am rather simple minded" and have one partner repeat the central phrase that triggered the emotional reaction. I will direct the other partner to let their spouse know when they are ready to be triggered and then to carefully study and report their reaction, as opposed to acting out in such a way to alleviate their internal pain or conflict.

***Mindfulness is a lot like slow motion.
It allows one to notice what was previously unconscious.***

Working in mindfulness with couples tends to undercut blaming and promote self-focus. Any therapist who has worked with couples knows the tendency of partners to shift the focus onto the character flaws of the other and to save themselves the narcissistic injury of self-examination. When one notices the present time responses that each partner has to the other and shifts the focus towards understanding their response, there is hope for the interaction disentangling as opposed to escalating in a circular fashion.

For example, When Jim and Sally started to talk about their recent dinner out, it soon became obvious that there was a lot of underlying emotion and the session was beginning to get out of control. She complained that he did not pay attention to her when she talked. He complained that she was trying to abridge his freedom. A good case could be made for both their indictments, and had I been a judge, I could have convicted and beheaded them both for their interpersonal crimes against the other. However, the legalistic arguments notwithstanding, this was supposed to be therapy. I wanted to study with them her sensitivity to abandonment and his to being controlled. Two experiments came to mind that could be conducted in mindfulness. One was to have her try to turn his head towards her and for him to study the images, memories, sensations, emotions and beliefs that surfaced. The second was for him to turn his attention away from her so that she could equally study the internal effect of this. By proceeding like this, they were able to stop arguing and make productive use of their therapeutic time. It is investigations like this that 1) undercut the circular escalation that is the hallmark of painful couples interactions, 2) help develop sympathy for the partner, and 3) reduce the tendency to take one's partners sensitivities personally.

Experiments: Many experiments can be created in therapy to provide the couple with an opportunity 1) to study their issues, and 2) to gently push the envelope of what is already possible to do, act and feel in a relationship. Providing such opportunities to deeply understand and to actually modify behavioral, cognitive and affective patterns is an important cornerstone of effective therapy.

For instance, Phil was upset that Kathy always got angry when he asked for something. A therapist would have a couple of options to help her explore her reaction to his requests. One way is for her to talk about how she feels and what she thinks when he asks, and to explore her associations around this issue. This is a fine method and is certainly tried and true in the analytic tradition. Another approach would be to ask her to become mindful, and to direct him to ask her for something. They then both have the opportunity to study the dynamic underpinnings of this potentially conflictual interaction in a very real, undeniable and responsible way, as opposed to a method which tends to be more mental and which can lack in deep internal connection. This is the same reason why working with the transference in individual therapy is so powerful. By studying the interaction in mindfulness, the couple also has the opportunity to develop a "relationship observing ego" which can be applied outside of the sessions. The crucial subtleties of object representations can be best noticed in the present, and tend to be obscured and distorted with the passage of time and implementation of defensive strategies.

Needless to say, one would also explore his issues around asking and the communication patterns that took place between them surrounding this issue.

There are different types of experiments. The two most important categories are verbal experiments and experiments involving touch. Examples of each of these will follow.

As a therapist, when you propose an experiment you do not know what the result might be. This kind of experimental attitude takes the willingness to make mistakes, to not position yourself as the sole authority on the inner world of the client, and to tolerate uncertainty - not an easy task!

Proprioceptive Signals: When a client begins to pay attention to the proprioceptive signals that arise internally in a spontaneous fashion, a whole new world of information that was previously unconscious begins to be available to him or her.

Kevin and Janie had trouble getting and staying close for very long before an emotional explosion occurred. I asked Kevin to sit some distance away and I asked Janie to begin to come physically closer to him while he noticed precisely what happened in his body. When she got within about five feet of him, he started reporting uncomfortable feelings, "squirminess", anxiety, a constriction in his chest, trouble breathing, and the feeling of being trapped. This experience was a window through which to study his earlier emotional intrusion by his mother, which colored his interactions with Janie. Instead of acting out from his uncomfortableness to make it go away, he began to become more conscious of what was driving him. Janie was also able to depersonalize her experience so that she did not feel so much the target of his withdrawal.

Boundaries: One filter through which to evaluate a couple is the continuum from enmeshed to disengaged. An enmeshed couple has overly permeable boundaries, while a disengaged couple has boundaries that are overly rigid. A somatic method for diagnosing this and working it through is to have a couple sit facing each other and use either a string or soft chalk to create a physical representation of their personal boundaries. This technique relies on the proprioceptive experiences of the clients as discussed above.

Alexandra complained in therapy about John's lateness. She organized every aspect of his life. He responded to this by stealing time for himself and by passive-aggressively being late. She responded to his attempts at autonomy with escalating rages. I asked them to draw boundary circles and to note how it felt different inside their bodies with and without the circles. John felt instantly relieved when he drew his circle. Alexandra, however, was faced with an intolerable feeling of aloneness and the memory of her father's abandonment of her and her family when she was twelve.

Inexperienced psychotherapists tend to oppose their client's defenses rather than helping them identify, appreciate and reown the wisdom of the defense.

Now, instead of John being the villain, the couple was able to appreciate the depth and intensity of her feelings and to creatively and compassionately deal with them, rather than fighting about his lateness and further alienating each other. Alexandra also began to disassociate John from her father and to give him a little more breathing room, which resulted in less rebelliousness on his part.

Working With Defenses: Inexperienced psychotherapists tend to oppose their client's defensive system rather than helping them identify, appreciate and reown the wisdom of the defense. When this happens, one of the only honorable things the client can do is to resist. Another approach is to support the defense. By doing this, the defensive system relaxes, feels sympathized with and the feelings it is designed to protect begin to surface naturally. It is in this way that the therapist begins to gain the cooperation of the client's unconscious.

This approach is different from paradoxical intention in that it is not a covert activity on the part of the therapist. Supporting a defense is always done with the permission of the client for the express purpose of studying the defense, providing therapeutic safety, and allowing information and feelings to surface from a deeper level.

In working somatically, one looks for somatic components of the defensive system and offers to have the spouse take them over.

For instance, Jake complained that he had to do everything and that Sally was never there for him. This reflected certain beliefs he had about the availability of emotional nourishment and his ability to take it in. As he spoke I noticed that he held his head rigidly on top of his shoulders in a military fashion. I asked him if it would be O.K. if Sally helped him hold his head up high. He said, "Yes". As she gently took the weight of his head that he had had to hold up by himself since his father taught him to be a "little man"; he first noticed how hard it was for him to let go of this control. Beliefs such as "No one will ever be here for me" started to become apparent. He could hear internally his father's injunction to "Be strong and not depend on anyone". Finally he started to let go and experience the sadness of his early abandonment which had influenced every subsequent relationship.

Psychological defenses are always somatically represented.

He was defended against dependency. The somatic representation of his defense was literally trying to hold his head up high.

Gesture, Posture, Tensions: From the foregoing it should be obvious that a tremendous amount can be learned about a couple by noticing their postures, gestures and tensions individually and in relation to each other. Here are some more specific samples of each type of intervention:

In the case of a couple afraid of intimacy, one way to work with gestures is to have one partner reach out to touch the heart area of the other while both study the internal effects of this action as well as what the hand seems to be saying.

An example of working with posture follows: Carl would get very upset with Mary. When he did, he fell into a private world of darkness and did not look up at his wife. We noticed that if he made visual contact with her, his image of her as a cruel and dangerous woman immediately diminished.

When Jessica and Dan came in to the office and sat down, the most obvious thing about them was the difference in the tension in their ankles. Dan's were more relaxed than humanly possible, while Jessica maintained a high level of tension, wiggling her foot constantly. One could speculate from this the type of conflicts they had around time, money and agreements. By pointing out and discussing these differences with them, they began to relax. In the next session she commented that she no longer felt compelled to make him be like her. As an alternative intervention, I could have also had each one try to make the other's ankle like their own, or I could have asked him to take over the tension in her ankle.

Couple's Sculptures: "A picture is worth a thousand words." A family sculpture is worth at least ten thousand. Particularly for couples who are highly verbal and cannot stop long enough to notice what they are actually doing, having them produce a sculpture of their relationship dynamics is very useful.

The technique works as follows: Have the couple stop whatever they are doing and notice the psychological stance that they are taking with their partner. Ask them to imagine what a physical sculpture would look like that personifies this dynamic. Each will probably come up with something

different. Then ask one of them to silently direct him or herself and their partner into this precise position in regards to each other - and hold it for a minute noticing how it feels in their bodies, memories and images it calls up, tensions, etc. After a while, ask for a report from each. From here, you can explore in a variety of ways. They can each exaggerate a certain aspect of their sculpture, or diminish it. They can look for associations about their stance. The partner can modify a part of their stance and the other person can notice internally how it affects them. Finally, it is usually best to have them recreate the sculpture to fit their ideal prior to continuing with the other person's sculpture. At this point it is also very important for them to search for any part of themselves that resists it being this ideal way.

For example, a turning point came in therapy with Howard and Susan when they did his sculpture. He placed himself in a corner with her reaching out towards him, as he beckoned with one hand and held her off with the other. He was able to study each part of his internal conflict about intimacy as he explored the feelings and meaning connected with each hand. We were able to experiment with what it would be like if only one hand was operative, and in particular, what it was like as he let her in more breaking the trance of the transference and beginning to experience her as his wife rather than his intrusive step-mother.

Breaking The Trance of the Transference: We are all familiar with the way in which emotionally laden images from the past form an overlay on present time experience, and how one's partner seems to take on an uncanny resemblance to the emotional characteristics of earlier intimates. This is the work of transference. Part of the challenge of couple's therapy is to break the trance of the past. What follows is an example of a technique, which although controversial, may be useful in achieving this result.

Debby had been molested as a child by her father. When her husband, John reached out to touch her in a way that could be construed as even a mild sexual advance, she was immediately filled with fear and revulsion. John, of course, had interlocking issues about his masculinity and rejection, which were easily triggered by Debby's sexual withdrawal. In the middle phase of therapy we tried an experiment designed to break the automatic association between John and Debby's father. Although intellectually she was able to tell them apart, on an emotional basis, they merged and the image of her father was cast over John making their sexual relationship impossible. After describing the experiment and asking for both of their permission, I asked Debby to go inside, check into her inner experience and let John know when she was ready by opening her eyes. He then started reaching out his hand towards her arm (a spot designated as "safe"). He did this in slow motion as she tracked her experience for the point where the fear and revulsion began to appear. At this juncture, rather than deeply exploring those feelings, (which would be appropriate in an individual session) I asked him to say to her: "Debby, I am John, your husband. I am not your father. I love you, I do not want to hurt you, and you can say 'no' to me whenever you need to". She took this in, and her feelings calmed down. We tried this three times before it was O.K. for him to actually touch her arm without triggering her old response. They were then able to successfully apply this to their sexual relationship outside of the session. He had more sympathy for her conflict and pain and personalized her sexual rejection considerably less as a result of this experiment.

Summary: The purpose of this article is to introduce the idea of somatic diagnosis and interventions in couple's psychotherapy, to provide actual examples of this and to stimulate thinking about new technical possibilities for effective therapy. It is not intended to provide comprehensive training in these techniques, which, because of their power and potential invasiveness, need to be carefully studied and, when applied, closely tracked for the client's response.

Rob Fisher, MFT IS A Hakomi Trainer and the Co-Developer and Lead Instructor of The Certificate Program in Mindfulness and Compassion in Psychotherapy at CIIS. He specializes in couples psychotherapy and consultation, as well as individual mindfulness based experientially oriented psychotherapy. He is an adjunct professor at JFK University and CIIS where he teaches somatic and

experiential methods of psychotherapy and couples therapy. He is the Lead Instructor and Co-Developer of the Mindfulness and Compassion Certificate Program at CIIS. He teaches experiential principles and techniques of couples psychotherapy to post graduate students and psychotherapists around the U.S. and internationally. He is the author of *Experiential Psychotherapy With Couples – a Guide for the Creative Pragmatist*, published by Zeig/Tucker, describing experientially oriented couples psychotherapy in traditional psychodynamic and systemic terms. He has appeared at annual CAMFT Conferences as both a peer and master presenter, as a keynote speaker at the Council of Relationships Annual Conference, and at the Psychotherapy Networker and USABP Conferences among others. He can be contacted at 621 Eucalyptus Way, Mill Valley, CA 94941, (415) 389-6340. His e-mail address is wildtemple@aol.com.

<i>COMMON SELF REINFORCING SYSTEMS</i>

- 1. Over-functioning/Under-functioning**
- 2. Pursuer/Distancer**
- 3. Angry/Withdrawn**
- 4. Attack/Defend**
- 5. Tyrant/Victim**
- 6. Demand/Resist**
- 7. Upset/Fix it**
- 8. Burdened/Industrious**
- 9. Impulsive/Conservative**
- 10. Independent/Dependent**

CONTACT STATEMENTS

Guidelines:

Contact: what is happening, how the client is doing it, what his or her experience is in the present.

Simple and short

Flexible, huh?

Present moment

Contact what is on the edge of awareness

Internal state is curiosity, warmth, acceptance and wonder

Examples:

Confused, huh?

Sad, cold, uncomfortable, lost....all emotions

A lot going on

Looking inside now...

Painful

Lots of thoughts

Something's happening

Settling in

Checking things out

Curious about that

Not quite it

Familiar?

Tough, hard, or difficult, huh?

Quieting down now

Comes in waves

Way in there

Hard to figure it out

Want to hide

So it's really hard to talk now?

Feeling young

So way out there you can't talk

Can't wait to get started

Lots of energy

Feels good to talk about this

That works for you

Important to figure this out

Working hard
Hard to take that in, huh?
Something new
Same old stuff
Something just happened

MINDFULNESS

How to induce client into mindfulness:

- Slow down-yourself-pace of session
- Use a soft voice
- Use simple precise short sentences
- Constantly track how relaxed and turned inward the client is. (If client is receptive and still, track for movement of eyeball under closed lids.)
- Model mindfulness
- Say things like:
 - Lets slow down
 - Bring you focus inwards
 - Just notice
 - You don't have to do anything
 - Notice anything that goes on in your experience
 - It could be a thought, image. memory, sensation, feeling, impulse or nothing at all
 - It could be a muscular change, or nothing at all
 - No right or wrong,/good or bad
 - Notice without judging
 - Pay attention to your internal landscape
- Track stillness with contact statements: Ex: ""Quiet, huh?"
- Maintain mindfulness with your pace, voice and contact statements and directions
- Allow for the client to deepen, not something to "happen". If you allow the space, things will happen.

IMMERSION INTO EXPERIENCE*

1. Reflect back the client's present moment experience, what they are doing or how they are doing it.

This is called a "contact statement" and is different from reflecting back content.
"(Sad), huh?"

2. Mindfully Immerse Client in Felt Sense of the Experience

Ask client to become mindful and to stay with that experience. Help them deepen their felt sense.

"Take your time and let your attention go inside so that you can notice all the details of your experience. Stay with that (sadness)." "Let yourself be with that (sadness)" "Let's invite that sense of (emptiness and loss to be here)." "Feel the whole history of that (sadness) in you".

3. Ask Client to Study the Experience

To further explore the experience, there are three possible directions to take:

- A. Where does it lead:** *"And notice what wants to come up next".*
- B. Deepen:** *Use a range of experiential possibilities such as the body, feelings, sensations, images, impulses, memories, beliefs : "Notice how your body participates in that (sadness)", "What kind of (sadness) is this?", "What is familiar about this (sadness), "What sensations go with this sadness", "What images come up with this?"*
- C. What's important about it:** *"And notice what is important about the (sadness)" "What does it seem to be saying?" What does it remember?" What decision do you make?"*

** Developed by Jon Eisman, Senior Hakomi Trainer*

ORGANIZATION OF EXPERIENCE

- We build internal models, blueprints, of the world that are stored deep in the psyche and in the body.
- These are not just ideas, but shape our bodies and how we live in them.
- We live and act in accordance with these models. These are called object relations, core beliefs, problem saturated narratives, etc. depending on theoretical orientation.
- Examples of these models are: The world is dangerous, people will dominate or humiliate me, there is not enough for me, I have to be powerless to be connected, Its not OK to express anger or follow my own direction, I have to achieve to be loved, I have to be intense or entertaining to keep your attention, etc.
- Core beliefs are predictive, protective and limiting. They are over-generalized from a small sample of the world.
- We follow the blueprints in a way that evokes complementary roles in other people in a way that confirms core beliefs. “Neurosis is maintained with a little help from our friends
- “To a lover a beautiful woman is a delight, to a monk, a distraction, to a mosquito, a good meal – Zen saying.” Hakomi is the mindful study of how we organize our experience.
- The job of therapy (and focus of Hakomi) is to uncover and make conscious these models of the self, life, others and the relationship between them and help people discover new options and embody more of their essential selves.
- Hakomi does this through working with present experience. Present experience is organized by core beliefs, and if we follow a thread on the surface of experience, we can find our way back to the core. People are holographic. Beliefs are embodied and communicated in how you walk, stand, shake hands, the pace that you talk, whether or not you look me in the eye, etc.

COUPLES SYSTEMS

