

We are IntechOpen, the world's leading publisher of Open Access books Built by scientists, for scientists

6,900

Open access books available

185,000

International authors and editors

200M

Downloads

Our authors are among the

154

Countries delivered to

TOP 1%

most cited scientists

12.2%

Contributors from top 500 universities



WEB OF SCIENCE™

Selection of our books indexed in the Book Citation Index
in Web of Science™ Core Collection (BKCI)

Interested in publishing with us?
Contact book.department@intechopen.com

Numbers displayed above are based on latest data collected.
For more information visit www.intechopen.com



Awareness, Groundedness, Embodiment: Intrapersonal Elements in Interpersonal Relationships

Emmanuel Villoria Hernani

Abstract

Human beings are inherently relational. To relate may mean to communicate, interact, transact, engage, involve and even just be with another person. It may imply fulfilling and satisfying the needs of one another. In a more altruistic tone, the relationship is giving and receiving. Others see a relationship as a social exchange. In contrast, others may see it as a social and ethical contract that ought to adhere. Others see a relationship as an instrument as a means to self-actualize or as a process of reaching the self-potential. There are many types of relationships. While others have a formal set of rules, there are interpersonal relationships that have loose code of affair. Among the dimensions of relationship, intimate interpersonal relationships are complicated. In contrast to business affair, marriage and in other intimate partnership, sanctions, roles and rules are not clearly defined. The ambiguity of interpersonal relationships reflects the dynamisms of its elements. Since its fluid, contextual and multi-faceted, there is no exact point of analysis. In this article, awareness, dialog, groundedness, embodiment are discussed in the light of intimate partner conflicts that are amplified using fictional case vignettes that are adopted from real cases of intimate conflict. This article concludes with the assertion that cultivation of relationships starts with the person.

Keywords: awareness, communication, embodiment, groundedness, dialog, relationship, Gestalt therapy

1. Introduction

Our capacity to relate is embedded in our neuro-mechanisms even before birth; Since the day an infant sees the light, and even while inside the womb, the fetus would already react to stimulus coming from the outside world. It would interact with the mother, forming a primal bond that bounded by physiochemical interactions—few of the primitive and primary interchanges between one entity to another [1]. Developmentally, even at the onset of existence, there is already a person and environment relationship [2].

As the child interacts with other individuals, and with the environment, the child begins to develop relational awareness. Confidence to the caregivers and to the environment that adequately nourish and nurture the needs of the child cultivates

trust to oneself and to the socio-environment which create a blueprint that the other person and environment are trustworthy entities [3]. Another important theoretical perspective posits that sense of trustworthiness, which would be imbibed in the form of affection and provision of basic security, effects secure attachment [4]. Researches on attachment suggest continuity of relationship patterns from infancy to adulthood and patterns have even shown to be present in intimate affairs [5–7]. Poor emotional attachment brought about by inadequate relationship in childhood, between the child and caregiver, contributes to mental deficiency which consequently affects the person's relational capacity later in life [8].

In an ideal situation, the person continually develops by assimilating supplies from the nurturing and nourishing field or environment [9, 10]. However, in reality, the environment can not satisfy the expectations of the child at all times, therefore, it is imperative that the child learns to use the resources of the environment while at the same time relying on inner resources when needs are unmet and not satisfied. This is a form of organismic self-regulation and this works well if there is an awareness of the differentiation between self-support and environmental support [11]. The child would learn from experience. The child's relationship with other people and with the environment play significant contribution to how the child would relate with others and with the environment. Experiments and exploration, risk-taking form part of the child's developmental activities. Therefore, awareness is a crucial element for growth and development. As the child matures, the capacity to differentiate, distinguish and assimilate becomes part of the maturation process. Though there are introjected templates of relationship that are carried on in adulthood, the person is not constraint and bounded as if every affair is already predesigned and predestined to happen. Thus, it is important for the person to be reflective, to know the basis of one's action. With reflection, events would hopefully become part of the learning process.

Fortified with positive self-regard and worldview, and having a founded sense of trust and security, the person responds to the environment with full dynamism. This would be evident with how the person would deal with different challenges in relationship with other people and with the environment and this would not be possible without awareness. The persistent interaction between the person and the environment, or the organism and the field, confirms the continuing event exemplifies the dynamism of relationship with another human being or with the socio-environmental field.

Human beings are innately relational; Person and relationship are two inseparable units. The dictum that human beings cannot relate considers the idea that relating may mean the intrinsic connection of the person and the other. Other in this article connotes another person or group of person or the situation where the person is situated in a given time. Two strangers in a bus stop may not adequately fit into the common understanding of relationship but in deeper comprehension, the mere presence affects one another—there is a connection but perhaps no relationship if we are using the common belief. Feeling of relief that one has a companion that late night; The feeling of security may not be verbally implied but the physiologic mechanisms adherent to the feeling of ease and comfort is undeniably present. Or it could be the opposite, like a feeling of fear that you are alone on a bus late at night with a total stranger. Whether the emotion response is negative or positive, there is a relationship between persons and the situation.

Relatedness signifies the state, condition and quality of relating; Connectedness, involvement and engagement have distinctive qualities of relatedness. In two dimensional model, comprising of vertical and horizontal axis, and each axis represents respectively, the person and the situation, the mentioned qualities of relatedness are dependent to the person-environment dynamics. However, the often use measurements like degrees, levels, and scalar quantities are limited only to study of the

person, which is always presumed as the vector of interpersonal relationship. A person functions as a dynamic organism that integrates, adapts and engages with the environment. Every dimension of personhood is interconnected. Measuring behavior without looking at the context, and taking out the situation out of the picture when it is supposed to be part of the unit of relationship is not an evaluation of relationship but of the behavior variable alone. In the example of two stranded strangers in a bus stop, the situation, or the field, i.e. the silence that night, the empty street, lamp post, the steel bench and the shed in the locale, enhances the phenomenological dimension of the person [12]. If the situation was different, it was not a bus stop and it was not late at night, the field of experience of the two persons would not be the same. Thus, presence is an interplay between dimensions of experience and the field or situation. Notably, presence can be magnified by the situation and it can as well make the former profound. Take the case of charismatic individuals whose presence can fill in an auditorium. Call it charm, enchantment and inspiration—the person enhances the situation. Intrapersonal elements as embodied by the person's presence work well with the situation. Situation can also be manipulated. Dimmed light and sultry music can add romantic spice to dinner date. A quiet and secure room can add a sense of security to a border. In a relationship, situation is conflict factor. Milieu change can de-escalate tension and it can help manage conflict as well.

Presence is essential component in interpersonal relationship. To talk, communicate, interact, transact, and engage are but limited and narrow distinctions of engagement without the element of presence. Presence, can be, in its plain sense, is just being there with another person. But it is not just being there literally, but being sensed and felt by the other person. Space and time are not limiting elements to presence. Presence is felt and sensed. A person, who is not physically present, or one that crosses one's thoughts may elicit presence.

Being present is not the same as having presence. The two is at different relational level. One can be present but not fully present. Like a student who is physically in class but whose mind wanders out to the field outside. When one is fully immersed with one self, the person may be present but there is no presence. Thus, a person's presence can only be confirmed by another person. The validation might be in the form of a statement of appreciation, a reciprocation of a hug, or it can be an emotional reaction. Needless to say that authenticity of engagement during an interpersonal discourse depends on the presence of the persons involved.

Presence is subjective experiences that are anchored on the dimensions of personhood. In the interpersonal and intrapersonal dichotomy, presence is embedded in the former. Subjective, existential and ephemeral, short-lived as it is fluid and dynamic, presence, flows in the form of awareness continuum, absorbed, immersed and involved that is grounded on the situation, embodied that is experienced in the flesh and articulated, animated by miniscule and gross motoric activities in the form of emotion. The intentionality of personhood, to relate and commune with one another, cannot be fully achieved without presence in the dialogical process. Dialog is making the subjective, the unknown, known, the unseen, seen to another person. In commune with the other, presence is felt, sensed and witnessed that intersubjective experiences become a dialog of spoken language and speaking body and movement.

2. Intrapersonal elements, the person and relationship

2.1 Relational homeostasis and holism

Fulfilling relationship abides to the principle of homeostasis and holism. The principle of homeostasis asserts that people are continually striving toward balance;

a natural, self-regulating rhythm between organism and the environment that strives for equilibrium. When this organismic self-regulating tendencies are interfered, conflicts between parties may arise. This is in connection to holism, another relational principle which describes a person and the field as an integrated and inseparable unit. The person's mind, body and spirit has an interdependent relationship with the field, the biopsychosocial environment and culture is part of the field. The embodied phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty asserts that the mind body and behavior are interconnected [13]. There is no mere behavior but encapsulated experiencing of emotions and mental acts that interplays with the persons action. Kurt Lewin stated that a behavior is a product of person and environment in a given time, a situation [14]. Human behavior and situation interaction is dynamic, it is in this process that holistic qualities are achieved. In cases when there is disturbance of the process, the person primarily self-regulates and adjust to the situation to achieve homeostasis. While the person in a relationship is interdependent to the other person, the dynamics of the duo is inter-reliant to the situation. While the persons, granting that the relationship is functional and the parties are in optimal level, engages with the situation, symbiosis is imminent.

2.2 Human factors of interpersonal relationship

Among the dimensions of relationship, intimate interpersonal relationship is complicated. In contrast to other interpersonal relationships like a business affair, an intimate interpersonal relationship, and even marriage and in other intimate partnership, sanctions, roles and rules are not clearly defined. The ambiguity of interpersonal relationships reflect the dynamisms of its elements which are fluid, contextual and multi-faceted—noting the distinctive character of individuals, the dynamisms of relationships in the backdrop of the zeitgeist, there is no other point of analysis but to start with the examination on the person in a relationship.

Personhood is an important factor in a relationship. Personhood is the reflection of quality of organismic strivings in midst of different relational fields (e.g. domestic affairs, club membership, marriage, work, religious affiliation, gender role, hobbies, interests). The many myriads of personality theories exemplified these complexities. Regardless of the varying discourses, these different theories are anthropocentric—it emphasizes the person as the measure of all things.

Intrapersonal or inner dimensions of an individual are made visible through interpersonal activities. In essence, embedded in every interpersonal relationship are the intrapersonal qualities of a person. These qualities serve as working mechanisms, blueprint of how a person would response in a given situation. Every theory of personality in psychology has its own thesis about the person. Analytic theories focus on intrapsychic elements [15, 16]. Other construct emphasizes traits and skills. Type-A Type B behavior [17], locus of control [18], coping styles [19], resiliency [20, 21], and empathy [22]. are intra-personal constructs or qualities. Underlayers of these constructs are intrapersonal elements that hold the gamut of every relationship.

2.3 Human factors and quality of interpersonal relationships

Many variables amplify interpersonal relationship problems. Communication, boundary, role, and rule issues; On the personal level, it can be between relationship dissatisfaction and satisfaction [23, 24]; Unmet needs can also be a factor [25, 26]. Therefore, satisfying the need-based elements are also crucial in a relationship. Undeniably, individual satisfaction is associated with the quality of an interpersonal relationship.

The association between psychological well-being and mental health to a relationship is apparent. Mentally healthy people are better marriage partners than people who suffer from some degree of mental illness [27]. Personality disorder, mental disorder, and substance abuse within marriage will likely contribute to an increased risk for relationship discord by increasing tensions in the relationship and detracting from either or both partner's relationship satisfaction [28, 29]. There are also reports that people with personality disorders indicate more relationship difficulties [30]. Further, there are associations between psychiatric disorders and relationship quality, and have found that psychiatric disorders are associated with significant marital discord [31]. Another study found some connections between post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, intimate partner violence, and relationship functioning [32].

Married people have lower rates of alcoholism, substance dependency and sedentary and unhealthy lifestyles than the non-married [33]. Married people experience less depression, anxiety, and psychological distress than those who are single, cohabiting, divorced, or widowed [34, 35]. Suicide rates are lower for the married than the never-married [36]. Sexual satisfaction is also greater among married people compared to unmarried and cohabitating people. Some societies view and treat married couples differently from those that are unmarried. One reason is that partners support and monitor each other making spouses accountable for their health and behavior [37]. Though association between relationships and mental health is said to be bi-directional, improving relationships may have significant positive effects on mental health, but improving mental health may not improve relationships [38].

2.4 Interpersonal relationship in gestalt field perspective

Awareness, spontaneity, dialog, grounding or groundedness, and embodiment are important intrapersonal elements in interpersonal relationships that ought to be taken into consideration. These elements are typified as the inner qualities of a reflexive, responsible, responsive, and adaptive person. The absence and deficiency of these inner qualities would lead to dysfunction because the person cannot adequately engage the situation. For instance, low awareness may lead the person to give an off-tangent response that would trigger conflict and misunderstanding.

The configuration of the interpersonal relationship involves the situation, the person or persons, and their experiences. A person with cultivated intrapersonal elements is someone with a strong presence and dialogical skills. The person is very connected with his/her personhood. Thus, the person is grounded and embodied because the individual can situate through body sensations and feelings, aware of the organismic want and need. The person engages the situation in an appropriate manner.

In a phenomenological lens, the relationship is examined in situ, personal experience against the given situation's backdrop. Thus, relational domains of human activity are dependent on many existing fields-- the other person and the wide field where the person and the other are situated. Take the case of a perpetrator of domestic violence, for example. Male perpetrators of marital abuse are inadequate and full of insecurities and anxieties [39]. Men who grew up in abusive and violent households are likely to commit abuse in their marriage. At the same time, another study [40] points out that predictors of intimate violence appear to be similar in women and men [41]. Personal issues and developmental experiences are supervening fields that limit their capability of being a good spouse. However, culture, the more significant field, plays an essential role in relationships as well. As the community's formal and informal collective manifestations of the perceived, sensed

and interpreted experiences, culture has certain dictates to every facet of human activity. Patriarchy is often associated with male dominance and violence [42, 43]. Suppose this association is true to all-male perpetrators. In that case, the embedded patriarchy overarches every field, and every male behavior explicates this cultural introjects. Thus, looking only at the act of violence committed at home would be a form of myopia because the problem is not only on the act of aggression but also on the situation that permits the perpetrator to commit the act. Elements of patriarchy are embedded in religious scriptures, and some abusers used selected scriptures to rationalize their acts [44].

As the person involves another person or with the field, the person engages in self-regulation processes. Dynamic as it is, there are chances that two or more figures would exist in the person's ground. For instance, a person is confused about whether to go out and watch a movie or just stay and rest at home. For example, in marriage, the affectionate embrace of the husband may raise the suspicion of infidelity to the wife, whose set of friends inform her that affection and attention are the husbands' way of compensating their spousal guilt. In this example, varying figures exist in a given situation. The wife's doubting stance points out her two figural experiences against the husband, whose figure is purely physical affection. Another figure is the introject that has clouded the judgment of the wife. If this is derived from a cultural injunction, and not just from her set of friends, this is a dilemma that can hound their union because the wife can make it into a fixed field where she can anchor her judgment of her husband's behavior. Idiosyncratic and unique to every person, there are greater chances that two persons may experience a single stimulus in a very different manner in the case of an intimate relationship. In this light, conflict is seen as part of the dynamic individual process. In gestalt perspective, conflict arises when two different figures, worldviews, perceptions of reality, etc. occupy the same place at the same time [45]. Two or more figures in one field may exist in harmony or in conflict with each other depending on the figure's respective dynamics. Two or more persons in a conflict would try to stabilize different figures by prioritizing that which is salient. Thus, awareness of the needs and wants is a critical aspect of a healthy relationship. If awareness is the fulcrum of personal and relationship health, everything starts there and ends there.

2.5 Awareness and Groundedness

Awareness is a continuum of a moment to moment formation of experience in a situation. In awareness, the person brings one's attention to a moment to achieve a fuller experience. Experience is amplified and enriched by attention and focus on oneself, especially to sensation, body movement, and emotion. Gestalt recognizes awareness not just to a figure, experiences of the person, but also to the other person and the socio-environment, or the field. Interdependence between the situation and the experience is recognized. Thus, the person is not just mindful but also somatically aware and sensationally focus. Experiences are further enlivened by groundedness and spontaneity, while deliberateness deadens the process. Thus, in a relationship, activities are lived if the person engages with the other person's invitation to co-engage. Relational awareness, or attention to the person-environment boundary, enhances a person's engagement because the involvement is grounded in the situation's context. Thus, awareness is a component of functionality, and it separates a psychologically healthy response-able person from the dysfunctional individual. Disturbance of contact between the person and the environment may lead to personal dissatisfaction, arrested and stunted effect, unfinished business in the form of resentment and pathological guilt, and nagging relational conflict between persons [46].

Awareness can continue to flow even if the person holds on to a particular experience. There are instances when one needs to stop and pause, for a while, to ground. When the person starts to ground, the person initiates focus and attention, training one's awareness to a figure that would come out from the field. It is like a spotlight trailing an object moving from one place to another. However, focusing is spontaneous and contemporaneous to experience; it does not attach, discriminate one experience from the other as pleasant or unpleasant, or deliberate. Rumination may involve the same cognitive process, but unlike awareness, the person is stuck on the negative thought process rather than accommodating the other figures that would come into the person's consciousness. There is no grounding involved because the person fully immerses in the thought process while neglecting the other dimensions of experience. Needless to say that grounding puts an aimless awareness into a context. It is paradoxical because the person who grounds will be carried to the next experience, from the awareness of the body to the emotion, to the cognitive aspect and the visceral response and the given situation further on.

Groundedness is the fuller recognition of the experience in relation to the situation. This recognition connects the mind and the body. Furthermore, if this is total, authentic, and congruent, there is groundedness. To come into contact with the self is a groundedness. Being in touch with one's emotion is groundedness and being attuned with the other person is likewise groundedness. Thus, a person who is in situ, in the situation, is in contact with reality. Cognizance has been used in the legal context. It is said that it is more profound than awareness. A person can be aware of but not cognizant, but the person can be cognizant but not grounded. Thus, a person can be sharp and brilliant, but not in touch with the situation [47, 48].

To fully come into contact with what is in the awareness is grounding. A person who has a good grounding of the present is literally in the moment. However, being aware of the moment is not a guarantee that one is coherent and conjugating. The person might be in touch with his/her emotion. The person can articulate his/her experience in the given moment, but the emotion might not be tangent to the situation.

A grounded person can spontaneously explore, recognize, name, and get in touch with one's own body, action, feelings, and thoughts. Groundedness enhanced intimacy to the person as it would deepen the experience, especially to a sensation, body movement, and emotion. An individual's way of thinking, feeling, moving, and interacting in a present moment is not complete without recognizing the other experiential components. Adults tend to revert to the past or prior experience to address a problem [49]. We all have learnings from our past experience. Wisdom comes with accumulated insights from the past. When the debacle is overwhelming, grounding enhances the person's problem-solving process. Grounded on the situation, the person will not be lost and be engulfed with complexities. Without grounding, the person repeatedly utilizes patterns of behaviors that may no longer be effective or the person's response might not be concordant with the situation.

To help the person stay in touch with the moment, in temporal or corporeal, in somatic parlance, the person's awareness is enhanced by grounding the person first to the fixtures, ambience and the temperature of the room before the person attend to his/her personal experience and to the other person's dress, smell or usual demeanor such tone of voice or accent. Grounding enhances the genuineness of awareness. Grounding is like a river flowing with no left unturned stones; It sweeps everything in its midst, carrying the debris down to the sea. In our daily language, we hear the words backflow, counterflow, flow, and stuck-up. Grounding then would mean the person's awareness of experience is smooth, non-erratic, and in its natural course, and it has weight and substance following the context of the

situation. A grounded yet flexible and spontaneous person represents a person with a flow who appreciates the moments as they occur. This confirms that flow is a good predictor of how a person lives life [50].

2.6 Embodiment

Embodied experiences enrich the person's experiential field. By attending to the body, the tactile zone and the visceral zone, and the awareness of fantasy. Being embodied means the individual is aware of moment-to-mode mode and sensitive to the body while dynamically interacting with the environment. Thus, in a phenomenological sense, every experience is existential elements. Embodiment emphasizes actual present behavior, posture, breathing, mannerisms, gestures, voice, and facial expressions. These elements of experiences are attended to by the person and conveyed during dialog. Through the dialogical process, two or more person is involved in here and now experiencing. Their fantasies, the retrospective, and prospective memories are acted upon through dialog. Since the person would feel acknowledged, appreciated, and attended to, the dialogical process might facilitate closure, integration, breakthrough, catharsis, and insight.

The influence of social media and other information sources can also be embodied. After reading a tragedy, a person may become sullen and depressed, amplified by the person's gestures. A teenager might mimic the postural stance of his favorite movie character. Identification is echoing of postures, emulation of behaviors and tuning in of cognitive schema to the other person on the basis of his projection. Often see a changed man, changing his voice and gestures according to what he would want to impress—this familiar in spiritual transformation. In the domestic scene, modeling behaviors is an essential tool in children's learning. In the case of domestic violence, behavioral cues are an important identifier of impending abuse episode.

Sandra would stop arguing with her husband once she would see that Ronnie already sulk. Tim admitted that he would know when Martha is in the mood or not because of her actions. A battered woman would often report gestural indicators of pre-violent episodes.

Embodiment is bounded by a culture that is in itself evolving. Thus, it is not easy to outgrow habits that are a product of culture and tradition. Being patriarchal is cultural, and it is embodied not only by men but also by women. Patriarchy exists not in a vacuum. Just like machismo, it is embedded in the body of the person who grew with it.

Culture, which is part of the person's field, is embedded in interpersonal relationships in every intrapersonal expression. This is indicated by an everyday occurrence in daily affairs and transactions. Aside from the nuances and gestures that are often emphasized in movies and stage plays, micro behaviors can ruin the moment of a beautiful romantic evening. Jessa would get mad when Job, her husband, would just look at her when she became affectionate. The gaze irritates her that when she would withdraw her hand from the proximities of Job, she knows that quarrel would be on its way. Some mannerisms would be taken as preludes to fight. Withdrawing eye contact can be a pre-emptive way of disengagement. Dental click is a sign of disapproval to some culture, and it can demean the other spouse who would want appreciation and admiration.

2.7 Dialog

I and Thou philosophical axiom of Martin Buber reflect the essence of dialog [51]. This existential tenet asserted that human beings could understand the meaning of

existence in relationships. Dialog, as a relational process, allows persons to be fully involved with each other. Full involvement would require full attention to the other person's flow of awareness in the given moment. Involvement is also reflected in the person's ability to contact or connect the other person's worldview and the situation. This can be achieved when the person is grounded with the other person's experience while the dialogical process is going on.

Dialog is an essential ingredient in an interpersonal relationship since it would help manifest situational experience's liveliness. Relational conflict is an inevitable process in a relationship and dialog can be an intervening element against destructive and unproductive conflict. Because of awareness, the dialogical process in a conflict situation ought to be facilitated by another person, perhaps a therapist who can accompany the involved parties through the grounded dialog awareness process. In a dialog, the person might shuttle between different modes of awareness. Dialog becomes grounded if the person's verbal expressions are synched with the sense-perception concerning the situation. Having a grasp of the situation and self-awareness, the conflict may be managed by regulating emotions and behaviors. As noted, an emotional outburst is always animated by behavioral cues that the other party is already familiar with an intimate conflict situation. A grounded person can de-escalate the conflict tension by providing alternative behavioral expressions. This groundedness will only come if the person's experience is in contact with the situation.

Take the case of Veera, for example. Veera was full of resentment to Victor, who admitted that he once got involved in a night sexual escapade with his high school classmate during their 20th grand reunion. Every time she would argue with Victor, she would wander from one issue to another that Victor would call her demeaning names – a form of acting out of control common to men [52]. Victor admitted that he could not comprehend the layers of issues, especially her resentment that was already resolved by his admission and apology.

There is no theme in their argument, and the other spouse was clueless about what was confronted upon. Victor may not be clueless since he would want to conclude that his apology already closed the issue. Victor's name-calling is an attempt to give a name and a theme, which only worsened the problem because it failed to connect to what Veera would want to convey. There is no dialog because they respectively anchor their expressions to differing issues. Supposedly, to have a point of conversation, one of them should listen and connect to the other first. In this way, they can give meaning and theme to the issue at hand. Whether they would first tackle Veera's resentments or Victor's name-calling, they would likely tackle the same gist of the issue. Listening, an element of dialog, enhance the person's grounding on the issue. As stated, awareness comes with groundedness. As the dialogical process deepens, Veera and Victor could ground their individual experiences while they tackle an issue. Grounded, they could even address the unsaid elements, which can be evident in body expressions. Aside from verbalizing their feelings and thoughts and recognizing its context, in enhancing their communication process, one must see the configuration of the other's experience. In the dialogical process, a response is not contingent on the completeness of the other person's experiences. The ability of the other to articulate and find meaning and the closest translation is an excellent dialogical capacity. In this context, the dialogical process is described as reconfiguring the person's different domains through cognition, emotion, and behavior. Verbal articulation is secondary to gestures, actions, movements, and kinetics. Reception involves the somatic domain involving the body and the external viscera related to proxemics, tactile, haptic, spatial, and speed. Dialog is a process of response, reaction, engagement, involvement, and intercourse between the person, another person, and the socio-environment.

2.8 Awareness, grounding, embodiment and dialog

Grounding celebrates life's dynamism; it defines a person's spontaneity and ability to make a meaningful union and separation with each passing moment. It functions to synthesize the human need for union and separation. From grounding comes embodiment. Through sensation-perception functions of looking, listening, touching, moving, smelling, tasting-- these sensory experiences in the process are the best example of good grounding. When grounding is enriched by behavioral and emotional in the body, the person must relay the experience to the other to achieve full grounding. Hence, the other's reception enhances the dialog, and the process can continue on and on.

Despite the many abuse cases that she went through, Ellen stayed with Bob, her partner, for 20 years. There were many break-ups, and these were initiated by Bob, who would only come home after weeks of gallivanting. Ellen would take Bob back only to be demeaned and beaten again. Her case's outright clinical impression is Post-traumatic Stress Disorder since it is common for domestic violence survivors to stay in an abusive relationship. Learned helplessness and learned hopelessness seem to be the theoretical anchor. In the addiction field, Ellen can easily be labeled as a pathological co-dependent. A co-dependent or co-addict would do anything for the other person, even to die for the perpetrator. Taking the case from Ellen's perspective, one would surely empathize with her justifications. Bob would apologize and become nice during each reconciliation, and he would only beat her when she would nag and confront him of his behaviors.

Deflection is a common conflict strategy among couples. Humor, trivializing, and expressing emotions during an argument may taper the tension, but these strategies do not motivate the partners to change [53]. Clearly, in conflict resolution, parties must delve into the issue to effect some changes. Dilution of experience may alleviate the degree of discomfort because the person would no longer stay in touch with the emotion and even the conflict situation. On the other hand, engaging with the other person by directly confronting problems motivates change and successful resolution [54, 55].

Ellen and Bob bore four children in their union and these children. Because of Ellen's sense of hopelessness, she assumed that her children would be orphaned if Bob would be imprisoned because of domestic violence. For Ellen, it is a rational and practical decision for her to stay with Bob; She felt that she did not have a choice but to sacrifice herself for the sake of their four young children. While other abuse victims stay in an abusive relationship because of economic dependence on the perpetrator [56, 57], others stay because of their children whose welfare might be affected by the absence of the perpetrator [58].

Patience is a virtue and perseverance and compassion; These three virtues mark the character of Ellen, a kind woman, wife, and mother of three. Ellen learned these values or intrapersonal ideals when she was a young child in school. Some religious sects and other cultures look at women as objects or possessions [59, 60]. Ellen must have learned, modeled, or assimilated it somewhere in her childhood. Even if Ellen is well-educated, an active civic organization member, an advocate for gender equality and women empowerment, she has some problems with her embodied past, which she could not wean out of her psyche. Psychological and behavioral problems like learned helplessness, post-traumatic stress disorder, and personality disorders may compel the victim to stay in an abusive relationship. However, other dimensions, like religious and cultural injunctions, are must also be considered.

Bob was employed even before he met Ellen during a social gathering. Charming, eloquent, and stable, Ellen accepted his marriage proposal after six months of dating. He was excellent except for his drinking, which was not even alarming for Ellen

because he still could drive after having some drinks with friends after work. Bob claimed that Ellen would beg him to stay upon his return, and he would. However, Ellen would incessantly ask him to stay that he would feel irritated that he would beat her up. If not for her nagging, their marriage would have been all right, according to Bob. Bob used a common victim-blaming strategy—a manifestation of incognizance and ego-syntonia. He is comfortable with his behavior, that he brushed the blame on his spouse. He admitted that he would drink and gallivant, but he impressed that he did not abandon his responsibility as a father and husband. He supported his family and they even owned a house and vehicles. He also sent their children to school.

The gamut of incapacity is incognizance. In the case of Bob, his main problem is gallivanting and drinking. His wife saw the same. He was indeed responsible, he took care of his professional and marital obligations. Bob was incognizant, there is no awareness, acceptance and in depth self-knowledge of his behaviors. Cognitive wise, he is comfortable with his behaviors because these synched with his self-concept. Ego syntonia fits well to his case. This is the common reason spouses would not submit for treatment. They will not see themselves as the problem, and if they admit that they are at fault, it would always be because of the other party. Victim-blaming and psychological manipulations are common tricks and ploy that would make the other party believes in the offending spouse.

There are worse domestic abuse cases than Bob on the account of irresponsibility; Besides drinking, drug use and gambling are also involved and not serial infidelity. There are even cases that involved child abuse and prostitution. Analyzing Bob and Ellen's case, the interpersonal dimensions of rules, roles, and boundaries are violated. The unwritten commitment in marriage was breached along with a violation of spousal roles and personal boundaries. The couple is not only grounded in the situation, they were also not into the situation that they were in. The situation calls for practical remediation, especially that violence is involved. Grounded remediation includes the assertion of one's rights as a spouse. This is also a way of recognizing the problem of boundary. Rights involve boundary. Recognizing one's boundary is a form of groundedness. One crucial element of groundedness is the capacity to see one's limitations.

Being on the ground impresses that the person uses his senses rather than the cerebral component. Using one sense makes one connected to reality. The person sees the physical environment, feels the ambience and calibrate his/her motoric response according to the spatial dimension. Thus, other avoidance and walking away from trouble may be a form of calibration or it might be avoidance of emotional discomfort in situ or because of anticipated discomfort. Inability to control impulse such as violence infers poor grounding. Grounding as emphasized, is the ability to be in contact with one self in relation to the situation. One can fully connect to the self without respect to the situation. People would get carried away by their emotion and would do things without considering its aftermath. They are indeed grounded, but sadly to their intense emotion at that given moment. Thus, the ability to connect with one's emotion in relation to the situation is the ideal in interpersonal relationship. The answer to the question of whether one has the right to become angry is incomplete if the context is not recognized.

Histories from elders and even generational myths about the past generations are embodied in the person. This is vividly noted that a simple word can provoke the emotion of the other. In one event that I witnessed, a female counselor-trainee wriggled on the floor after hearing a word that was one of the many verboten in their family. It was not because of the word but the embodied dread and fear associated with it. There were instances when a client would vomit after saying a statement against her father that she harbored for years. She came to therapy because she wanted to stop her nagging issue that affected her marriage.

An individual, in any pleasant, stress-free and typical situation, attend to experiences with ease. In a distress situation, there is interruption and or blockage of awareness. Individuals who found difficulty in grounding can snap and act on impulse. The person would also experience some difficulties in connecting the cognitive element to the affective, somatic-sensory, behavioral, and relational domains that responses may be out in context. When there are unpleasant experiences, an individual who has the capacity for awareness can see angles and domains that he can self-regulate by either withdrawing or confronting the situation. In perpetrators of violence who are used in detaching and differentiating themselves from a stressful situation, aside from suppressing tension by non-recognition and displacing their anxieties to things, they dissociate their bodily experience from their mental faculty. Not knowing where the tension is in the body, the person would become overwhelmed even more. They would experience a tunnel-like vision that they could no longer see their behavior's appropriateness to the situation. Awareness is hijacked by an emergent figure that became fixed in a given time. Embodiment process is crucial in tension filled situation. This is evident in the case of a battered woman who killed his husband by incessantly batting the latter's head with a firewood. The woman claimed that she felt the surge of energy from her body going up to her head that she was not able to control herself. She admitted that her hand could no longer feel though it could still hold things. As noted, there was absence of corporeality. In another case example, a client admitted that she could not feel anything with her body that she would want her partner to physically abuse her. At least, pain can confirm her existence, she said. Contact precedes grounding. The contact to grounding process follows the mechanisms of recognition or attention to deconstruction/dissolution before assimilation.

Rona, a survivor of physical abuse, came for an interview. When she came into the room, she looked around before asking me if I was the psychologist assigned to her case. After that, she sat, and she began to cry while saying that it was the first time, since she was married to Ric, to be in one room with another guy (referring to me, a male psychologist). Her hands trembled while experiencing fear. She was drowned with the idea that Ric would barge into the room and hurt us. I instructed her to be aware of her breathing. Using a grounded breathing technique, she was asked to scan the room while trying to find her breathing rhythm. This is to let her ground using her senses with the situation, which was safe and secure than what she had imagined. Rona embodied fear and terror that every situation for her is the same experience back at home. Thus, she needs to anchor herself in the physical environment wherever she would be. In this way, she could differentiate her past and present milieus, which would overpower her after engulfing herself with the negative emotions associated with her experiences.

An individual with poor intrapersonal elements often encounters a problem with other persona because of poor dialogical skills, flight to fantasy (inadequate or absence of grounding), and proneness to misperceive because of depreciated awareness. Poor grounding and awareness block the person from experiencing the present fully. Resentment is a typical example of this concern. The person may erratically shuttle from past to present and future without fully grounded in the shifting experiences. Having awareness but with no grounding, the person would not fully know what is going on. The person would be like a kite hovering aimlessly without direction. Getting stuck up is the worst because the person would experience the past as if it is the present. If the person has no flow or has a little flow, then the person's awareness is different.

Optimal functioning is equated with a personal awareness of one's own body, action, feelings, and thoughts. From awareness, the recognition of our capacity to sense leads to the context of groundedness. The full assimilation of these

experiences into the corporeal realms is embodiment. Enhancing the person's awareness by grounding it to the situation and recognizing the somato-sensory components of the experience increases the capacity of the person for self-support [61]. Self-support is inherently a narcissistic process that is teleologically design to fulfill and nourish the other inherent quality, the relational self. The processes of awareness, grounding and embodiment exemplifies the need to cultivate the self to appropriately engage and involve with another person— to the achieve an authentic, in situation, dialogical process.

3. Conclusion

Individuals in relationships experience conflict. It is even said that a person who enters into an intimate relationship is marrying conflict. Indeed, the cultivation of relationships is a pressing human problem. The basic constitution of a relationship is the person. Decades of research provide different vignettes of relationship dynamics, problems, and resolutions. Studies on human factors provide glimpses of understanding. Even the other fields of study already contributed to the discourses on human beings and relationships. This article focuses on significant intrapersonal elements of personhood. The assertions provided are a somewhat radical shift from another thesis on relationships because this article focuses on what appears to be esoteric and ephemeral concepts like awareness, groundedness, embodiment, and dialog. Thus, this article identifies the important dimensions of relationships. Second, the three intrapersonal elements are expounded with case vignettes to give life to each discussion. Third, the article illustrates the benefits of the intrapersonal elements on relationships.


Understanding the different intrapersonal elements under study requires reflexivity. The vignettes provided demonstrated that incorporating these elements is crucial to grasp the nadirs of interpersonal relationships. Incorporating these elements challenged the common assumptions about interpersonal relationships. Indeed, this article reveals the depth of personhood and its association with interpersonal relationships.

Author details

Emmanuel Villoria Hernani
Cebu Normal University, Cebu City, Philippines

*Address all correspondence to: hernanie@cnu.edu.ph

IntechOpen

© 2021 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. 

References

- [1] López Moratalla N. Comunicación materno-filial en el embarazo [Communication between mother and embryo or foetus]. Cuadernos de bioética : revista oficial de la Asociación Española de Bioética y Ética Médica. 2009. 20(70), 303-315.
- [2] Wheeler, G. The developing field: Toward a Gestalt developmental model. The heart of development: Gestalt approaches to working with children, adolescents and their worlds. 2002. 1, 37-82.
- [3] Erikson, E. H. (1993). *Childhood and society*. WW Norton & Company.
- [4] Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss. Separation: Anxiety and anger*, vol. 2. New York: Basic Books
- [5] Feeney, B. C., & Collins, N. L. (2001). Predictors of caregiving in adult intimate relationships: An attachment theoretical perspective. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 80(6), 972.
- [6] Wallin, D. J. (2007). *Attachment in psychotherapy*. New York, NY: Guilford Press
- [7] Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2007). *Attachment in adulthood: Structure, dynamics, and change*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- [8] Riggs, S. A. (2010). Childhood emotional abuse and the attachment system across the life cycle: What theory and research tell us. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 19(1), 5-51.
- [9] Perls, F.S. *In and Out the garbage pail*. Real People Press. 1969
- [10] Lee, R. (ed.) *Values of Connection: A relational approach to ethics*. Gestalt Press. 2004.
- [11] Perls, F., Hefferline, G., & Goodman, P. (1951). *Gestalt therapy*. New York, 64(7), 19-313.
- [12] Brownell, P. (2010) *Gestalt Therapy: A guide to contemporary practice*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing. p. 174
- [13] Merleau-Ponty, M. *Phenomenology of perception*. Routledge. 1982
- [14] Lewin, K. *Force field analysis. The 1973 annual handbook for group facilitators*. 1946. 111-13.
- [15] Freud, S.S. *An outline of psychoanalysis*. Penguin. 1940
- [16] Jung, C.G. *The undiscovered self*. Routledge. 2013
- [17] Friedman, M., & Rosenman, R. H. Association of specific overt behavior pattern with blood and cardiovascular findings: Blood clotting time, incidence of arcus senilis, and clinical coronary artery disease. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1959. 169, 286.
- [18] Rotter, J. B. Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement. *Psychological monographs: General and applied*, 1996. 80(1), 1.
- [19] Menaghan, E. G. Individual coping efforts and family studies: Conceptual and methodological issues. *Marriage & Family Review*, 6(1-2), 1983. 113-135.
- [20] Werner, E.E. What can we learn about resilience from large scale longitudinal studies? In *"Handbook of Resilience in Children"*. 2004. New York, Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers
- [21] Ungar, M. (Ed.). *The social ecology of resilience: A handbook of theory and practice*. Springer Science & Business Media. 2011.

- [22] Rogers, C. R. Client-centered therapy: Its current practice, implications, and theory, with chapters. Oxford, United Kingdom: Houghton Mifflin. 1951.
- [23] Kelley, H. H., & Thibaut, J. W. Interpersonal relations: A theory of interdependence. John Wiley & Sons. 1978.
- [24] Sprecher, S. Equity and social exchange in dating couples: Associations with satisfaction, commitment, and stability. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 2001; 63(3), 599-613.
- [25] Maslow, A., & Lewis, K. J. Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Salenger Incorporated. 1978. 14, 987.
- [26] Baumeister RF, Leary MR. "The need to belong: desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation". *Psychological Bulletin*. 1995. 117 (3): 497-529. DOI: 10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497. PMID 7777651.
- [27] Braithwaite, S., & Holt-Lunstad, J. Romantic relationships and mental health. *Current Opinion in Psychology*. 2007; 13, 120-125. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2016.04.001>
- [28] Powell, D.E., and Fine, M.A. Dissolution of relationships causes. *Encyclopedia of Human Relationships*. 2009. SAGE Publications.
- [29] Collazzoni, A., Ciocca, G., Limoncin, E., Marucci, C., Mollaioli, D., Di Sante, S., ... & Castellini, G. Mating strategies and sexual functioning in personality disorders: a comprehensive review of literature. *Sexual Medicine Reviews*. 2017; 5(4), 414-428.
- [30] Mayer, J., Savard, C., Brassard, A., Lussier, Y., & Sabourin, S. Subclinical psychopathic traits and romantic attachment in treatment-seeking couples. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*. 2020. 46(1), 165-178.
- [31] Whisman, M. A., Salinger, J. M., Labrecque, L. T., Gilmour, A. L., & Snyder, D. K. Couples in arms: Marital distress, psychopathology, and suicidal ideation in active-duty Army personnel. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*. 2019.
- [32] Birkley, E. L., Eckhardt, C. I., & Dykstra, R. E. Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, intimate partner violence, and relationship functioning: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*. 2016. 29(5), 397-405.
- [33] Wu, Z. and Hart. R. The effects of marital and nonmarital union transition on health. *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 2002. 64:420-432.
- [34] Brown, S.L. The effect of union type on psychological well-being: Depression among cohabitators and marrieds. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. 2000.
- [35] Strohschein, L., McDonough, P., Monette, G. and Shao, Q. Marital transitions and mental health: are there gender differences in the short-term effects of marital status change?. *Social Science and Medicine*. 2005. 61:2293-2303.
- [36] Kyung-Sook, W., SangSoo, S., Sangjin, S., & Young-Jeon, S. Marital status integration and suicide: A meta-analysis and meta-regression. *Social science & medicine*. 2018. 197, 116-126.
- [37] Waite, L. J. and Gallagher, Maggie. The case for marriage: why married people are happier, healthier, and better off financially. New York: Broadway Books. 2000.
- [38] Braithwaite, S., & Holt-Lunstad, J. Romantic relationships and mental health. *Current Opinion in Psychology*. 2017; 13, 120-125. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2016.04.001>
- [39] Rothenberg, B. The success of the battered woman syndrome: An analysis

- of how cultural arguments succeed. *Sociological Forum*. 2002. 17(1), 88-103.
- [40] Delsol, C. & Margolin, G. The role of family-of-Origin violence in men's marital violence perpetration. *Clinical Psychology Review*. 2004. 24(1), 99-123. DOI: 10.1177/000169939103400403
- [41] Dutton, D. G., Nicholls, T. L., & Spidel, A. Female perpetrators of intimate abuse. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*. 2005. 41(4), 1-31.
- [42] Bettman, C. Patriarchy: The predominant discourse and fount of domestic violence. *Australian and New Zealand journal of family therapy*. 2009. 30(1), 15-28.
- [43] Tonsing, K. N., & Tonsing, J. C. Exploring South Asian Women's Experiences of Domestic Violence and Help-Seeking Within the Sociocultural Context in Hong Kong. *Violence against women*. 2019. 25(12), 1417-1432.
- [44] Ross, Lee E. (2012) "Religion and Intimate Partner Violence: A Double-Edge Sword?," *Catalyst: A Social Justice Forum*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 3, Article 1. Available at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/catalyst/vol2/iss3/1>
- [45] Melnick, J. Managing differences: A Gestalt approach to dealing with conflict. *Gestalt Review*. 2007. 11(3), 165-169.
- [46] Yontef, G. M. (1979). Gestalt therapy: Clinical phenomenology. *Gestalt Journal*, 2(1), 27-45.
- [47] Demetriou, A., Makris, N., Kazi, S., Spanoudis, G., & Shayer, M. (2018). The developmental trinity of mind: Cognizance, executive control, and reasoning. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science*, 9(4), e1461.
- [48] Spanoudis, G., Demetriou, A., Kazi, S., Giorgala, K., & Zenonos, V. (2015). Embedding cognizance in intellectual development. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 132, 32-50.
- [49] Kepner, J.I. *Body Process : A gestalt approach to working with the body in psychotherapy*. Jossey-Bass Social and Behavioral Sciences. 1993
- [50] Nakamura J., Csikszentmihalyi M. The Concept of Flow. In: *Flow and the Foundations of Positive Psychology*. Springer, Dordrecht. 2014. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9088-8_16
- [51] Buber, M., & Agassi, J. B. E. *Martin Buber on psychology and psychotherapy: Essays, letters, and dialogue*. Syracuse University Press. 1999.
- [52] Fehringer, J. A. (2010). *Understanding intimate partner violence and marital power in Cebu, Philippines*. The Johns Hopkins University.
- [53] Cohan C.L., Bradbury T.N. (1997). Negative life events, marital interaction, and the longitudinal course of newlywed marriage. *J Pers Soc Psychology*. 73:114-128.
- [54] Holmes JG, Murray SL: Conflict in close relationships. In *Social Psychology: Handbook of Basic Principles*. Edited by Higgins ET, Kruglanski A. New York: Guilford; 1996:622-654.
- [55] Nickola C Overall, N.C., McNulty, J.K. What type of communication during conflict is beneficial for intimate relationships?, *Current Opinion in Psychology*, Volume 13, 2017, Pages 1-5, ISSN 2352-250X, <https://doi.org/10.1016/>
- [56] Diddy Antai, Justina Antai & David Steven Anthony (2014) *The relationship between socio-economic inequalities, intimate partner violence and economic abuse: A national study*

of women in the Philippines, *Global Public Health*, 9:7, 808-826, DOI: 10.1080/17441692.2014.917195

[57] Jeyaseelan, L., Sadowski, L.S., Kumar, S., Hassan, F., Ramiro, L. & Vizcarra, B. (2004). World studies of abuse in the family environment – risk factors for physical intimate partner violence, *Injury Control and Safety Promotion*, 11:2, 117-124, DOI: 10.1080/15660970412331292342

[58] Payne, D., & Wermeling, L. (2009). Domestic violence and the female victim: The real reason women stay. *Journal of Multicultural, Gender and Minority Studies*, 3(1), 1-6.

[59] Rahim, H. (2000). Virtue, Gender and the Family: Reflections on Religious Texts in Islam and Hinduism, *Journal of Social Distress and Homelessness*, 9:3, 187-199, DOI: 10.1023/A:1009455901269

[60] Knickmeyer, N., Levitt, H.M., Horne, S.G. & Bayer, G. (2004) Responding to Mixed Messages and Double Binds: Religious Oriented Coping Strategies of Christian Battered Women, *Journal of Religion & Abuse*, 5:2, 29-53, DOI: 10.1300/J154v05n02_03

[61] Wollant, G. *Gestalt Therapy: Therapy of the situation*. SAGE Publications Limited. 2008.