

SEXUAL ROOTEDNESS AND THE CAPACITY FOR LOVING

**An article for a commemorative publication 2002 " Festschrift"
for Jack Rosenberg (founder of IBP - Integrative Body Psychotherapy)
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IBP can be counted among the forms of psychotherapy in which the theme of sexuality is not treated like a "stepchild", but rather awarded an adequate place in the total concept that is neither over nor under-valued.

My special gratitude to Jack Rosenberg and his wife Beverly K. Morse: for their humor and structured clarity - being at ease in dealing with difficult problems in relationships. It is a pleasure to see them work especially with couples.

I will begin with a Summary of the psychosexual development from girl to woman and from boy to man and their ideal mirroring (accompaniment) by father and mother (The sources for this are: a background knowledge of IBP; the Oedipal phase and puberty sections are based primarily on Sexual Grounding Therapy after the precepts of Willem Poppeliers)

Human beings are predisposed by nature to be sexually orgasmic. Few of us however, are born into a sensual, life-affirming environment in which sexual energy and the forms of its expression are seen and celebrated as the source of life.

Conception and Pregnancy

The development of the psychosexual identity begins at conception. The most important messages regarding one's identity as male or female, physicality and sexuality are delivered through the umbilical cord from the mother to the embryo in the womb. During pregnancy a cellular memory of the experience of gestation in the mother's womb develops, and thus these basic messages are passed on more strongly through the maternal line.

To the Reader: Take a moment and ask yourself how your own mother would finish the following sentences: "Men are...strong, weak, never there, hard outside and weak inside, only want one thing...?" or "Women are...weak, powerful, controlling, manipulative, over emotional, over solicitous...? Spontaneously completing these sentences can give insight into the acquired gender prejudices that can later disrupt our love relationships and partnerships.

The mother's relationship to herself as a woman and how present she was as a sensual and sexual being has a direct influence on the gender image developed by the fetus. Was she able to enjoy being a woman? How did she live her sexuality? What were her attitudes and relationships with men? Did she like them and their bodies?

Whatever the feelings and thoughts during this time, most influential is the mother's ability to differentiate them from the embryo she is carrying. Ideally she can give the developing child the messages: "This is my story, it is not you. You as a person are absolutely okay. It is good that you are here"

Otherwise, an automatic identification with the mother's negative feelings will develop and possibly a deep disturbance on the existential level, an insecurity about one's right to exist.

Birth and the First Years

From the moment of birth, the reactions of the parents to the gender of their child, and the welcome extended or not extended to the girl or boy child, influences the establishment of his or her identity as male or female.

Every newborn is primarily a receptive being, open to love, caring and nurturing on all levels by its parents. If the parents are unable to supply these needs because of their own concerns, illnesses or problems, the child will develop sensitive antennae to the parents' needs and attempt to make them happy. This mechanism of being more in tune with the other's needs than one's own is called *Agency* in IBP terminology and in adult relationships often leads to the diminishing of sexual feelings.

Jack Rosenberg likes to use an expression here: "To nice each other to death", the attraction that exists between the two polarities of male and female disappears because neither party is really centered and "at home" anymore.

It is from a basis of feeling nurtured that a feeling for one's own autonomy can develop. The first "no" with which a child distinguishes itself from its mother is an important step towards the development of a healthy feeling for its own boundaries. The supportive *Good Parent Messages* at this stage would be: "I give you permission to be the same as I, to be more or less. It is not what you do but who you are that I love. Sometimes I will tell you no, and that's because I love you." However, if the two year old child is consistently inundated or abandoned it learns to protect itself by developing a *Character Style* or protective style, that will most probably interfere with his or her ability to develop and sustain intimacy and sexuality in relationships.

The Oedipal Phase

Between the ages of 3 and 6 children begin a process of gender specific differentiation in which the opposite gender parent plays an important role. Young girls and boys in this age are curious, open, innocent and excited discoverers of "the little difference" while playing doctor.

The father plays an important role in the **Development from Girl to Woman**.

Psychoanalysis has shown how meaningful he is to his daughter's development as a sexual being. "I'm gonna marry daddy" says the little girl seriously and is seldom taken seriously. However, it is extremely important for her adult sexuality for her to be recognized and accepted as a sexual being by both her parents during these critical years. With innocent curiosity, a young girl tests herself as a budding woman in relation to her father. She needs and wants his recognition as a female without being inundated by his adult sexuality. In words this could be expressed by the father as: "I see you as a beautiful little woman. I take responsibility for my own sexual needs and live them with your mother (or another adult woman)" The desired message from the child's mother, who ideally can enjoy her own life as a woman would be: "I am a woman like you and stand behind you supporting you while you approach your father

as a young woman. If you are confronted by feelings or actions that are too much for you then I will protect you. “

These messages are usually not verbalized, but rather delivered through body language and relationship patterns.

When this mirroring functions ideally, the young girl becomes sure and independent in her sexual identity. However, this requires parents (or other adult care persons) who are themselves secure in their own sexual identities and who are able to care for their own sexual needs well.

In this phase the young Aphrodite can easily release her innocent sexual focus on her parents and freely live her development. For example in playing doctor with other children.

This is the healthy basis for the free development of her sense of her feminine sexuality. She will be able to choose her future partners free of the need to seek what she did not receive in an inadequate mirroring from her father during this phase of her development.

Apart from the psychological dimension, the father is important for his daughter on the physical energetic level. The external mirror of his masculine energy enables her to complete her own inner female energetic cycle.

Seen from a physical-energetic viewpoint, the vagina is the receptive pole through which women receive energy, conducting it upward toward their positive energetic pole, the heart. The heart energy is given outward and thus completes the energetic cycle with which we communicate to others.

The masculine energy flow cycles in the reverse direction: he is receptive in the heart and receives the female energy through this pole. This life energy flows downward into the penis, his positive pole. From there the man gives the energy outward.

Metaphorically, the root of the penis is anchored in the heart.

The Boy's Development to Man

All men are born of woman. The Oedipal phase is more difficult for a boy because he must separate himself from his symbiosis with his mother to be able to approach her as the “little man” who recognizes the woman in her. This developmental step requires time and a mother's awareness of when her son needs her as “woman” and when as “mother” from whom he still needs comfort and cuddling.

The father (and/or the mother's new partner) plays a decidedly important factor in his son's development during this stage. He is the first important man who, through his presence in the boy's life, becomes the first role model of the masculine. How is it to be a man? Through his identification with his father a boy can “swim over to the masculine shore”. Should his son's bond with his mother be too strong, the father might need to actively seek out his son and show him the world of men. Ideally, he can support his son without entering into competition with him. This is the basis of the boy's ability to re-approach his mother as a young man.

The young boy, full of pride, innocence and joy, shows his mother his penis. This is a child's expression of his masculine sexual love that comes from his heart. A healthy mirroring would be if his mother can share in his joy and receive this sign of his power and love with acknowledgement and not as a threat.

Often the mother reacts to his phallic expression with a disguised repugnance. She could also inundate him with her own feelings, which he experiences as a penetrating energy in his heart. This is a subtle transgression, as she “doesn’t do anything wrong”. However, she floods her son’s heart with her own feelings of love and at the same time disregards the “little man” in him who has revealed his love to her through his pelvis, by showing her his penis. This form of misuse of her son by the mother is often difficult to recognize, because it happens on an energetic rather than a physical level.

This excess of heart energy and castrating inhibition of the energy in his pelvic region as a boy can have the consequence in his adult life that he experiences his sexuality as separate from his heart. Men often have difficulties forming close bonds. Passive-aggressive behavior, impotency, premature ejaculation, sexual violence and abuse against women as revenge for his own injuries can be possible consequences.

For both genders it is the receptive pole that is most vulnerable, where they are most likely to receive injuries. That means the traumatizing and misuse of the natural flow of sexual love energy takes place in the vagina of a girl or in the heart of a boy.

In adult relationships it is often the case that the woman needs to feel trust and a bond in her heart before she can open herself sexually and the man needs to feel the connection first through the pelvis. That is to say, he wishes to be received in his masculine energy before he will allow his heart to be touched. The underlying theme is the same for both however, the connection between heart and genitals is missing, it was closed during childhood as a protection against injury from the mother or father in the receptive pole.

Few of us in our generation can imagine our own parents making love. The fact remains, of course, that we were all born through their sexual union. Were we to be ideally mirrored by our parents (or in divorce, our parent’s new partners) during this Oedipal phase the female and male energy cycle would automatically flow through our bodies. That is, when the internalized mother and father come together as sexual beings, our own genital-heart connection opens naturally from itself.

An adult sexual energy flow is self-regulating. Ideally, the mother and father are anchored in their own sexual identities strongly enough that they do not need to use their son or daughter for their own confirmation as man or woman. The son and daughter however, do need their mother and father as adults of the opposite sexual pole, to discover and build their own energy cycle.

Puberty

In many original cultures the transition from girl to woman and boy to man is celebrated by initiation rituals. The contents of these rituals often include reference to the bodily changes, questions of the meaning of life, truth and vision quests and entail a retreat into the solitude of nature. The parents are important as individuals in the background. An “authentic objective leadership” is required.

It is during puberty, when the male and female reproductive organs develop the maturity to fertilize and bear new life, in which the individual’s sexual energy cycle matures into a self-regulating system. It is important during this period to test and experience one’s sexuality in different sexual encounters among men and women

until one arrives at the realization: “It is possible with any and everyone but finally I do not need a partner to feel and experience myself as man or woman.” This would be the ideal basis from which to choose a partner in freedom and love.

This description outlines an ideal development that in reality seldom occurs. Therefore, it is important to reflect upon one’s own sexual history and to compensate for missing *Good Parent Messages* in the phases of one’s own sexual development to the point where these messages become integrated as perceptible physical sensations. (Based on Sexual Grounding Therapy). As long as these unfulfilled childhood idealizations and needs remain focused on an adult partner, repeated painful disillusionments will occur.

A responsible attitude to one’s own needs will also lead one to search for resources in friendships with members of one’s own gender and a sense of contact with one’s male and female ancestors. When we take our place consciously and respectfully in the generational line of our great-grandparents, grandparents, parents as well as the present and future generations, we open the spiritual dimension. A more powerful, third source of strength, that fundamentally unites us all, can thus flow into the man/woman encounter.

Many people today, who are searching for a new experience of their sexuality or the release from the traumas of their early sexual histories find themselves in tantra seminars.

The Tantric Approach

Tantra is an ancient path of enlightenment originating in the orient, based on a life affirming principle in all aspects of being. It includes the acceptance of oneself and the polarities of our dualistic world, excluding a valuation of good or bad. Sexuality is perceived as life energy in its different qualities.

In our culture sexuality has long been taboo, or, after the sexual revolution, hyper sexualized and misused for commercialization. Both of these block a natural access to sexuality. This could explain the enormous interest and ambivalence often connected with the theme.

SkyDancing Tantra (after Margot Anand) teaches an energetic approach to sexuality through three pathways, breath, voice and movement. The energetic charge in the body is collected in the pelvis and distributed upward. A sexual encounter takes place not only in the genital region but, throughout the entire body involving all the senses. From an energetic charge in the pelvis the energy is raised through the “inner flute” (the energy channel running along the vertebrae) and creates a connection between the genitals, heart and consciousness. Rituals to awaken the senses open an awareness of the here and now which allows the specifics of our family scenario to be left behind. Our observations however, are that the integration of experiences from a tantra seminar into daily life are often impossible due to one’s being caught in patterns originating from one’s *Primary Scenario*. Often a basic understanding of boundaries, presence and the ability to regulate one’s own energy flow independent of a partner are also lacking.

As previously mentioned **IBP brings important elements to the theme of sexuality and relationship:**

An aware approach to boundaries as an expression of a healthy feeling of self-worth is a necessary basis for intimacy and sexuality. The ability to extend one's boundaries can be an important experience, but even more important is the ability to perceive one's own inner room and limits.

The principle of *Containment* (i.e. the ability to build an energetic charge, allow it to spread throughout the body consciously and to maintain it) also plays an important role.

Containment is also the basis for the experience of a conscious and satisfying sexuality, in which both partners remain present. It is indicated in a satisfying full body experience in contrast to an excitement and release experienced solely in the genital region, which can leave a feeling of emptiness behind.

A conscious self- regulation of the body energy

The *Sustaining Integration* exercises from IBP apply here. They support the ability to develop and sustain an energetic charge in the body independent from a partner. High charge breathing builds a sensation of energy in the body, opening different areas in the body by consciously moving the created charge downwards from the chest. An alive body feeling is created and an experience of a presence in one's own body, of "I am". The key to a positive feeling towards life lies in oneself rather than in the best partner.

IBP offers a differentiated outlook of how energy in the body can be heightened and how its discharge so often occurs unconsciously (e.g. through emotional catharsis, movement or voice). Above all it presents the opportunity to discover how far it is possible to remain fully present in a state of heightened charge. It takes practice to develop the ability to maintain presence and awareness in the sexual orgasmic cycle experienced with a partner. Otherwise the intensive sexual sensual experiences cannot be integrated into the daily experience of self.

A further important instrument is (Picture of Energetic Charge-Release Cycle)

The Orgastic Energetic Charge-Release Pattern as a Diagnostic and Therapeutic Aid:

The illustration of the typical orgasmic charge-release cycle can be utilized in the context of IBP therapy sessions, for analysis of the dynamics in a couple's relationship, or as feedback to assist in one's own abilities of self-regulation. It can help identify in which phase of the cycle the individual difficulties lie. We often encounter couples in therapy in which the different themes are experienced in different ways and they thus miss the possibilities for intimacy. Various questions and thoughts about the different phases can bring these themes to awareness:

On Intimacy:

-Do you have a feeling of calm inner peace and balance within yourself? Is it possible to create a feeling of intimacy between you and your partner? (e.g. In intimate conversation or *Skin Time*; time spent lying skin to skin and sensing both oneself and one's partner)

On Physical Approach, Building a Charge and Containment:

-Are there difficulties in remaining present or a difference in tempos during a physical approach and in building a charge? (e.g. One person has difficulties remaining present while building a charge and the other needs a high charge in order to feel him/herself at all) they will seldom be able to “meet” each other during sexuality.

-Where does energy get lost? Through *Agency*; abandoning oneself and feeling the needs of the other more than one’s own needs? What are *Speed Limits*? (Limits established in the body by the *Primary Scenario*) Is it felt to be permissible to live life fully or only on reduced energy? The ability to guide the increasing energetic charge in the body is dependent on the ability to allow the body to build a charge while remaining present and physically relaxed; the higher the charge, the greater the need to maintain Grounding.

Women often complain of a **lack of desire**. One possible cause of this could be *Inundation* through too much *Agency*. It requires an inner sense of space and room to be able to sense one’s own needs. *Agency* can be more inhibiting for a woman as she loses contact with her own receptivity at the same time as allowing her “battery” to be discharged.

One possibility to approach **Difficulties in Remaining Present** in a sexual encounter is to build a charge together and then to relax together (penis in the vagina)-without moving in a position in which eye contact and grounding are both possible.

On Orgasm and Release:

How much are you able to let go of control? Difficulties here often arise from *Character Style* (ideas about how it has to be, fear of losing control) *Agency* (the awareness by the other) *Speed Limits* (an inner sense of permissible aliveness)

On Satisfaction:

After orgasm do you feel increased energy sense of well-being, or do you lose your sense of presence after an orgasm? (e.g. By falling asleep, lighting a cigarette...)

IBP also recognizes sexuality as a mirror of the relationship. Relationships will exist as long as there are human beings. We enter into intimate relationship out of a desire to recognize ourselves in the other and to experience a unity underlying our separateness. To align ourselves with the underlying reality that we are all connected. Human sexuality can be a temporary door into this dimension.

On this path of opening ourselves to another human however, we encounter our early injuries and the protective mechanisms adopted in our childhoods. Therefore, it makes little sense to approach this through solely a sexual or transpersonal path. IBP offers useful tools that can be utilized in daily life to enable love and sexuality to be incorporated into a relationship even after the honeymoon.

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Born in 1961, has her own practice for bodyoriented psychological counseling, couples and sexual counseling; founder and co-leader with her husband Robert Fischer the project “Man-Woman Seminars and Trainings” on the themes of: Man, Woman, Relationship, Sexuality, Meditation. Three important sources come together here; the Tantric Teacher Training from Margot Anand, Sexual Grounding Therapy by Willem Poppeliers and IBP from Jack Rosenberg, which combines to form a good combination in the work with relationship and sexuality.

In the IBP Institut she is leading together with her husband the further education on “Sexual Therapy and Sexual Counseling”

