

For the Cover

At last! The secret is out about romantic relationships. Hidden learning is what we know but lack words to express. Early learning, as an infant or child, reveals ‘how we are wired’ for intimacy. This book gives practical tips for discovering the script of your unique hidden learning, the way it impacts everything important to you and how it might be changed through memory reconsolidation – an important discovery from the neurosciences. Insights from schema therapy and coherence therapy are conveyed with helpful clinical examples and clear therapeutic principles. This book delivers what you need to know to have a satisfying relationship.

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Hidden Learning: The Way we are Wired for Intimacy

Introduction

Romance is exciting; love is essential. But...

Relationships can go wrong. Easily. We behave in surprising, irrational and even self-destructive ways. Being in love doesn't stop someone acting without regard for their lover's feelings, heedless of consequences, and with brutal intent. We might think we are free to find happiness, why then is it so elusive?

Britta thought she had finally found 'Mr Right'. Six months and no conflict, intense attraction and seeming compatibility. What could go wrong? But then he made a sexual move on her best friend.

There is this one important thing: hidden learning (HL). This is an easy concept. *It is my term for anything you have come to know, at any time, but you cannot put into words.* In this book I will argue that this is what goes wrong in relationships. You might ask, "Why haven't I heard about this?" And "Why is it so important?" Good questions.

The importance of hidden learning is just beginning to be seen by relationship therapists. It is hinted at in many current theories but as yet not fully explored – it is almost completely absent from self-help books. Perhaps hidden learning is closest to emotional learning in coherence therapy (Ecker, et al., 2013). However, emotional learning as a term over emphasises an emotional quality when there are hidden cognitive elements as well.

Principle 1: Everything we do makes deep emotional sense, even when the why is outside our awareness (Ticic, et al., 2015).

Reflect: I am assuming you have thought a lot about relationships. Perhaps you have read self-help books. A few or many. This is of course important, but now you have an opportunity to think about what you have not yet put into words. You can appreciate why our thoughts go in circles and never get anywhere. There is missing data. Hidden learning is the key to unlock the most important insights about your relationship.

Think of the challenge in this book to be like a detective. You will need to discover hidden truths that do not make sense on the 'surface' and can seem irrational. You will need to follow the clues of your family and life history. Only in this way can you find the very specific hidden learning that has shaped your life and relationships.

Challenge: You can skim read this book for a quick overview. This may be a good initial strategy, but don't leave with a sketchy understanding of the ideas. There is much to learn if you work to understand the content and do the exercises. Getting the most out of this book will take considerable effort. At times it might seem like 'homework'. And some insights may be painful. Perhaps your reluctance makes sense. But would you be willing to make a contract with yourself? Something like: I will make understanding hidden learning a top priority in my life for the next three months. Sign and date this statement it helps. You will need something like this level of commitment.

This book is about you going on a journey. It provides a map. Discovering your hidden learning is like arriving at the address of a house. I would like it to be as easy as typing the address into Google Maps, but at the moment the address is blank. So we have to work our way there. We will start with your family. The generations of your family are like the city you live in. This provides your context since birth. We will look at this map with the genogram and your autobiography introduced in the next couple of chapters, then five chapters on schemas which are like suburbs and then your more specific hidden learning, the street, and finally we hope to arrive at your house. Once you are there you can do something different which will change your life. Let the surprises begin...

To Read Further

Full details of books are in the References section at the end of this book. The term emotional learning comes from Coherence Therapy (Ecker, et al., 1996, *Depth oriented brief therapy* and 2012 *Unlocking the emotional brain*). Also Ticic and colleagues (2015). *What's really going on here?*

Chapter 1: Unlocking the Secret of Hidden learning

Hidden learning is like a mysterious person. Maybe male; maybe female. Somehow familiar but barely known. With lots of secrets. But something draws you in, for the moment and possibly for a journey of a life time.

Hidden learning is anything we have learned through experience but lack words to express. Thought comes first, then words. So what we first learn is initially inarticulate or ‘hidden’. It may be right or wrong or a bit of both. But because it is *learned* it will always feel *true*.

How can this be possible? First we will consider some *sources* of hidden learning.

Infants don’t have Words

There is hidden learning from early childhood. We begin to speak at about 18 months old. But we are not a ‘blank slate’. There is much that we have come to know by that age. This includes our earliest assumptions about people and the way life works. Many lessons are learned in the first years of life.

Robbie had a disturbed childhood. His father was a violent alcoholic; his mother was submissive, ineffectual, and a perpetual victim of the father’s drunken rages. Robbie was slow to learn to speak, well after two years old, but he had learnt much about how families work. Of course nearly all of this hidden learning was dysfunctional.

In this case hidden learning is what Robbie assumes to be true before he had any capacity for language.

Reflect: What do you think Robbie learnt about male and female relationships? Who is more powerful? Whose needs get met? How? If Robbie acts on this what kind of partner or husband do you think he will be?

Kylie was Robbie’s younger sister. She grew up in the same home. When she was 15 she became pregnant to the high school ‘bad boy’. He did drugs and was increasing violent on methamphetamines. He kept asking her to ‘look out for him’ when he burgled houses to support his habit. Kylie had low self-esteem but something stopped her agreeing to be a criminal accomplice. She sought counselling and this helped her think more clearly about the future she wanted for herself and her child.

Principle 2: Hidden learning lacks words but it will always feel true.

We can now begin to see the lifetime legacy of hidden learning. For both Robbie and Kylie their understanding ‘about the way things are’ had been laid down like railway tracks before words formed in their mind. Hidden learning is simply a way of learning about what is ‘normal’ in life, how to act and how to treat others. It is not about truth because this knowing is often dysfunctional.

Robbie had a de facto relationship in his early twenties. He was violent to his partner. She escaped to a women’s refuge and he was later charged for assault. Kylie got into trouble with her ‘bad boy’. How do we make sense of these poor choices in relationships? Both did things from a ‘sense of what is right’ but the source was outside of their awareness in early hidden learning.

Reflect: A disturbing question to consider. We can assume that both Robbie and Kylie had moments of feeling loved, but how much was it entangled with painful experiences in childhood? How much, for example, does Kylie associate being loved with suffering? This can be seen in her forming a relationship with the ‘bad boy’. This reflects an aspect of her early hidden learning – one that got her into difficulties. And it will continue until she sees the pattern.

Lazy Learning

Hidden learning does not stop with an ability to speak. We continue to have it throughout life. But in this case it is learning that is assumed, not thought about, in effect what I call ‘lazy learning’. This is the opposite of thinking about our life, instead there are a lot of unconscious assumptions. This might be easier to illustrate:

Brendon was barely competent in his job. He had repeated work reviews and eventually he was put on a performance plan. Against all the evidence, he thought he was very good at what he did, saying “I can rely on natural talent. Eventually they will realize how valuable I am in this place!” This indicated hidden learning from his childhood and possibly teenage years when he was bright enough to drift through school. But this understanding of himself did not apply to him as an adult. He relied on earlier learning, without taking the time to look at feedback from his supervisors. In this sense he was lazy in the way he thought about himself and his life experience.

Sally-Anne was described by her friends as “ditsy”. She floated through life, enjoying “the good times” but was slightly frustrated that her boyfriend refused to commit to her. She asked, “What is the problem? We get on.”

It may seem obvious to state that we need to think about what we experience: What has happened. Why? What the implication is for who we are and how we operate. If we are not thoughtful in this way, we will not integrate experience with prior hidden learning. This is a cognitive process, based on our ability to think and evaluate. Only in this way can this knowing become more articulate, challenged when wrong, and adapted to be more realistic.

Disrupted Hidden learning

There are ways that the thought process associated with hidden learning can be disrupted. One way this can happen is through what Freud identified as ‘defence mechanisms’.

Denial is a good example of a defence mechanism. It is like a ‘psychological switch’ that refuses to believe what is obviously true. This often happens, as therapists often observe, with the shock of grief.

Wallis was anxious when her son was posted to Iraq. She tried to remain positive but her worst fears were realized when a chaplain came to tell her that her son had been killed by a road side bomb. Initially she was in a state of shock, but then she clung on to the hope that a mistake was made, “I can’t believe it. The Army makes mistakes all the time, they get it wrong and my Billy is just another mistake. They will find him soon, alive and well, I am certain.”

This denial of reality delays the grief process and risks it becoming more complex, even pathological. But denial can be about other things.

An important area of denial that effects our hidden learning is when we deny truths about ourselves. This includes what we avoid. Sometimes it is truths about ourselves that are ‘too painful’ to face.

Rita was raised by a single mother who was devoted to her. Rita could depend on her “completely”. Later when she began to date, she found that men would pull back complaining that Rita was too “dependent and needy”. Rita had learned that “If I love someone I must depend on them emotionally.” But she denied it saying, “I am independent and basically I don’t need anyone.” So there was a disjunct between her view of herself and basically what she had learnt as a child. Unfortunately, her hidden learning about dependency was expressed in her adult relationships. This was the foundation of her behaviour in relationships but she lacked the ability to see that it applied to her. In this way she could not acknowledge or put into words “For me love and being able to depend on someone is the same thing.”

Psychologists would say that Rita lacked insight. She could not see herself in a realistic way. This is an additional way that hidden learning can fail to be expressed, because it is filtered out by denial, with the result that an individual simply acts out the ‘hidden script’.

Trauma and the Fragmented Self

Traumatic events can disrupt hidden learning. A sense of self may be shattered, disrupting any potential integration, or the natural process of putting learning into language.

Sally was raped after a school disco. She was just 16 and recalled having a few drinks, and added, “I didn’t deserve that!” Fortunately, she had a reasonably healthy childhood with many assurances that she was loved. After the assault she suffered nightmares for a number of years, but she did not conclude that she was worthless because she felt loved by her parents.

You might not have Sally’s healthy childhood. But like her did you have traumatic experiences? If you have experienced trauma at a young age, did later events confirm how you felt about yourself? Repeated trauma can reinforce early hidden learning with adverse consequences.

Barry was neglected as a child. His mother was dependent upon heroin and worked in the sex industry. Barry saw her being assaulted by violent partners. This trauma reinforced his view of himself, “I am not worth being protected.”

Trauma can mean that hidden learning remains unexpressed. This is because trauma disrupts normal thinking and insight, so it remains fragmented and proves elusive. It is hard to articulate because it remains like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

A traumatic experience can also lead to hidden learning.

Penny had ongoing relationship issues that suggested trauma related hidden learning. Often she felt vulnerable, easily withdraw from social situations and panicked if she saw any blond macho man with any features of her attacker. She was surprised when she made this connection since her memories of the rape had been fragmented with “lots of gaps”.

The challenge is to deal with what are largely unseen emotional realities. But that is the purpose of the book generally and the journey we are on together.

Additional Thoughts

It is almost paradoxical to assert the power of hidden learning is when it remains ‘out of sight’ or perhaps ‘beyond our insight’. This is because we assume such learning to be true about ourselves, so it is natural to act upon it. This is being consistent!

Principle 3: Hidden learning without words is powerful. Because it is what we assume, this determines how we behave as adults.

When we assume a truth, it becomes ‘sacred’. We cannot dispute it. This will bypass the way we think about our beliefs including finding ways to challenge or dispute them – so hidden learning determines behaviour unconsciously.

Another almost frightening thing about hidden learning is that it is an expressed truth about ourselves. This goes to our identity and who we are. The odd thing is that on occasion, we will sabotage the possibility of positive feedback because it would necessitate a re-evaluation.

Monte had a deep conviction that he was “worthless”. He went from abusive relationship to abusive relationship, unhappy but confirmed in his sense of being not worthy of love. Then he was surprised to meet Suzanna who was incredibly loving. Monte was confused and found himself being irritable and uncharacteristically bursting out in fits of rage. Soon the relationship was under pressure, with Suzanna considering her commitment. Fortunately, Monte entered therapy, at the encouragement of his girlfriend, and he began to see how he was sabotaging the relationship because he was uncomfortable being loved and not abused.

Theoretical Discussion: This ‘speechless realm’ has been described in various ways. Sigmund Freud is rightly credited with developing our understanding of the unconscious. He saw a wide range of mental processes, occurring automatically and not available to mental reflection. These include memories, motivations, repressed feelings, desires, instincts, automatic skills, subliminal perceptions, habits and automatic reactions (Westen, 1999). This ‘grab bag’ of unconscious processes includes more than the learning model of hidden learning. In academic psychology this inarticulate learning called implicit learning (Reber, 1996). There are other terms for this including tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1958), emotional or limbic learning (as we have noted in the coherence therapy of Ecker, et al., 2013), and *habitus* in the writings of Bourdieu (1977, 1984). Note that hidden learning does not imply any truth to what is believed, though some terms like ‘tacit knowledge’ do.

Brain Detour: Another way of understanding hidden learning is in terms of how the brain works. We now know more about where we think. Conscious thought is carried out in the frontal cortex, the folded part of the brain that is nearly 2/3rds of what fills our brain cavity. The frontal cortex is what makes us both rational and creative. This is where our capacity for language is found. But there are other parts of the brain from the ‘reptile’ stem through to the ‘mammalian’ mid-brain. This includes the limbic system (an area in the mid-brain) which is important for our emotions. This is where ‘limbic learning’ is found or as you might have guessed hidden learning. At the simplest level hidden learning is learning about what causes pain or pleasure, which naturally enough is learnt at every level of the brain.

Summary

The ‘dark continent’ of hidden learning remains largely to be discovered. This chapter has explored some sources including early infantile learning – when a child lacks the capacity for language. It can also be the result of a lack of cognitive integration through ‘lazy learning’. The awareness of hidden learning can also be suppressed by our defence mechanisms such as denial. The effect of trauma which fragments experience is another potential factor to impact any potential integration or articulation of hidden learning. And finally because hidden learning often remains out of sight, it is like a ‘puppet master’ which can pull the strings of our lives. The remaining chapters in this book outline how you can move from *hidden learning* to *aware knowing*.

Chapter 2: City Map: Intergenerational Knowing

Family. We join through birth. But it is like arriving two hours late for a party. Almost everything important has already happened and we see ‘second hand’ through the effects on those around us. And often we can only guess at what is *really* happening.

How do we come to terms with this? If you are to understand such dynamics then you will need some tools such as the genogram (figure 1), which is a way of mapping your family over the generations. This will be the focus of this chapter. The next chapter will introduce an autobiography of relationships and the attachment model.

Why all this Self-focus?

Socrates, one of the greatest of ancient philosophers, said, “Know yourself.” The importance of this has echoed through the centuries. It is still relevant for living and especially for relationships. This book is written with the belief that this is the most important of all life goals, but unfortunately difficult to attain with any depth of insight. The following are reasons to gain such self-knowledge.

Being without self-knowledge:

- Leaves you open to mistaken ambitions.
- Can result in choosing the wrong romantic partner because you don’t know your own emotional needs.
- Leads to repeating painful patterns from childhood.
- Foolishness in spending money, because we don’t know what we really want.
- ‘Being in the dark’ about your own values and principles to guide your life.

With self-knowledge:

- You can avoid mistakes in dealing with other people.
- You have a better basis for making life choices including career and spending money.
- You can form more conscious relationships, making sure that there is a healthy balance of getting your needs met and being responsible for someone else.
- You can respect others and yourself.

To Do: Look at the website <http://www.thebookoflife.org> which has great resources for relationships, including what has informed the above. Start with the chapter Know Yourself.

But insight is a difficult process. This is because we are often vague about ourselves, the sources of insight are unconscious, and it is painful to acknowledge our faults. Generally, it is in an intimate relationship that our difficulties become most obvious, certainly to our partners, but if we are honest to ourselves as well.

Reflect: Think about the messages you commonly receive about yourself. What do your friends say? Generally, they are too polite. Your spouse or partner? These are useful but mixed. After all he or she may be a ‘competitor’ for scarce resources. Your enemies? They say too much.

This journey of self-insight is what will occupy the rest of this book and of course be the reason for the suggested exercises. A lot of work, to be sure, but with benefits more than you can imagine. Now to the big picture of your family.

The Genogram

The genogram gives a picture of your family over three generations. The symbols create a kind of ‘family tree’. The genogram was developed in family therapy, but is now widely used. It is helpful in maintaining an overall perspective, including the influence of individuals on each other and identifying repetitive dynamics.

In the following genogram we see that both Tom and Nancy grew up in alcoholic homes. Tom had a previous marriage to Jane, which ended in divorce and later Jane died of breast cancer. Nancy lives much closer to her immediate family and tends to get involved in their dramas. In 1986, the year after the stillbirth of her daughter Ann, she had multiple stresses following the death of her mother: her father increased his drinking and her younger brother was admitted to hospital with a diagnosis of schizophrenia. This might explain her need for additional support which she sought in the brief affair with Joe. Tom and Nancy have relationship counselling because Tom is ‘having feelings’ for Sue, a temporary administration assistant in his accountancy firm. Nancy complains that Tom works long hours, neglecting his family and household tasks.

The symbols are seen in the following diagram (such as squares for males, circles for females, dotted lines for a relationship, line for a marriage, one cutting line for a separation, two for a divorce, crossed out for death, etc.). The symbols are flexible and can be adapted to what interests you about your family history.

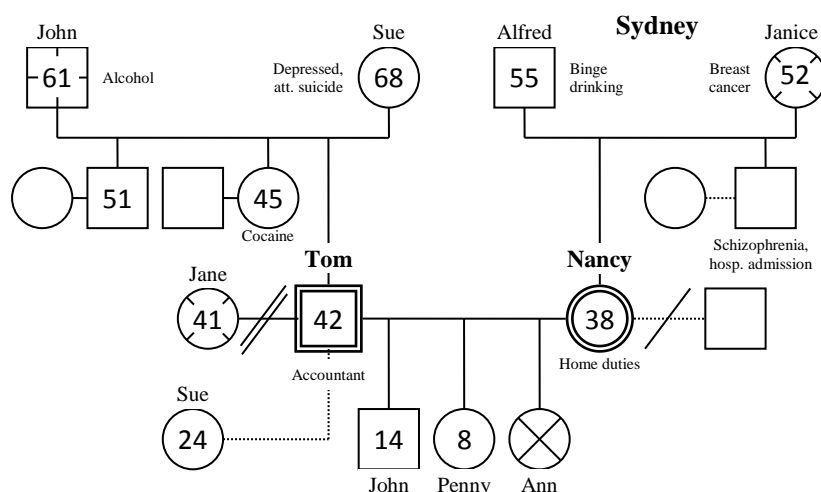


Figure 1: Genogram of Tom and Nancy

Identifying hidden learning. Reflect on what leads to what? In the example above we see a lot of relational consequences. This includes Nancy's affair and Tom's feelings for Sue. Join me in some creative speculation. We can start thinking about possible hidden learning. There is no right or wrong, just speculate, and eventually you can develop possibilities about what hidden learning might look like in your family.

If we take a 'step back' from Tom and Nancy's relationship there are some recent events such as the death of Ann their daughter. This will have intense meaning, for example Tom might believe after the death of his first wife "people who love me will die". If this was a belief of Tom it could have been reinforced by the death of his child. This has a characteristic of being slightly irrational but you can see some 'emotional logic' which is typical of hidden learning. When Nancy was young her brother had a psychiatric admission after a psychotic episode. This might play out in various ways. For example, she could be overly rigid since anything unexpected could have terrible consequences including admission to a hospital. Any reminder of craziness is frightening. A step further back would locate the child of both Tom and Nancy in alcoholic homes. What roles did this create in family life? Who were permitted to be child-like or impulsive? Who were carers? What are the attitudes towards addiction? Of course hidden learning would be more specific for both Tom and Nancy, some possibly similar and others very different. A good question for Tom to think about is why he works so hard? This would certainly reveal some hidden learning. This might include working hard brings respect and rewards, work is 'my space' where "I can escape tensions at home." This may also show early learning about male and female roles in the home.

As I have illustrated with Tom and Nancy, this is just 'scratching the surface' of potential hidden learning. Your family is far more complex and will generate many possibilities. The genogram and some of the tools that follow can provide a lens to look and see your family from different perspectives.

Your Family in a Picture

Draw your own genogram and include the following:

1. *Names*, age, highest level of education, occupation, and any significant problems.
2. *Indicate relationship status* whether single, married, de facto, separated, or divorced.
3. *Transitions* Dates of birth, death, marriages, divorces, separations (anniversaries tend to raise anxiety or cause sadness), any other significant stressors or transitions: accidents, illness, change of job, moving house; especially note these if any have occurred just before an event such as work related stress, separation or an injury.
4. *Geographical location* of parents and other family members, patterns of migration.
5. *Ethnic* and religious affiliations.

Now add the same for your spouse or partner. Don't worry if you have to re-draw it to fit everyone on the one page. Everyone makes a mess of their first attempt at a genogram.

Now include Family Problems

Identify any problems including: alcohol abuse, addictions, genetic defects, suicide, violence, accidents, job instability, betrayal, gambling, sexual abuse, criminal behaviour, drug addiction and mental illness or psycho-somatic disorders. It is easy to have a short-hand symbol such as @ for alcoholism, but make up your own for any theme that you think might be significant.


If all this provides the bones, then the flesh is the emotional patterns. Think about anyone who might be enmeshed or over-involved, or not talking to who (emotional cut-offs), and any triangles (two people close at the expense of a more distant third person). Who are the success stories in the family? By what criteria (business success, academic, sport, or financial)? Are there clear gender roles? How important are sibling positions? Who are the 'black sheep' or 'scapegoats'? Who are the failures (and how is this judged)? What are the family rules, taboos, hot issues, secrets, and family scripts? Or anything that interests you. These all point to a legacy of what is assumed in the family. And that might point to hidden learning.

The wider context can also be considered. What historical forces have shaped each generation? What wars, economic conditions, birth-rate changes, cultural forces and new technologies were influential? Have notions about gender changed or remained the same? If there was a migration, what differences in culture were introduced? One cultural value that influences self-care is selflessness versus self-consideration. Did this change in the family? How has the meaning of work changed through the generations? Use the genogram to think about your family history.

At this point you have probably raised more questions than answers. But a good question is a good place to start.

Practical Application

Doing a genogram is very useful because:

1. *Represent* The genogram can visually supply a lot of information. It allows you to see the generations and to notice, perhaps for the first time, distinctive family patterns.
2. *Give context* It provides a context for any problem including difficult relationships. Think about any relationship difficulties in terms of what was modelled by your parents. We can see family history, which may give an indication of stresses on a generation and the possible impact of traumas such as war or forced migration.
3. *See themes* You can identify dysfunctional themes that run through a family including antisocial behaviour, violence, neglect, physical or sexual abuse and addictions. Do you notice this repeating in subsequent generations? Were your needs met as a child? What strengths can you identify either in people or family groups? What is the contribution to the family of people who joined through marriage or relationship? Do you notice anything surprising?
4. *Identify problems* Think about who has a problem such as being anxious or easily stressed. Is this an inter-generational problem ‘handed down’ in the family? How does the problem influence others?
5. *Tracking* You can track emotional patterns. What emotions were expressed; what repressed? Who were close? Who were distant? Did anyone ‘escape’ the family never to return? When you are in a low mood, or unreasonably angry, can you see the origins of such emotions in your childhood.
6. *Analyse* Choose a different colour to overlay your genogram with some indications of the quality of relationships. You can use a zig-zag line  to indicate a conflicted relationship, three parallel lines to indicate an enmeshed relationship and -| -| to show an emotional cut-off. Again be creative and think up your own symbols to indicate different kinds of relationship on your genogram.
7. *Predict* You can predict how difficult it will be to recover from problems. If there are strong inter-generational themes of dysfunction, you can assume any improvement will be slow. This may also be an indication of personality disorder or serious mental health issues.
8. *Think* about what your parents modelled to the children of your generation. Consider patterns of nurture. After reading the section about attachment styles, you might consider patterns in your family. What beliefs were most obvious for people and in each generation?
9. *See spirituality* Identify those with a religious faith. Who would you consider a good role model? Any who you would consider ‘hypocritical’? Can you see patterns in the spiritual commitments in your family? Or does unbelief, perhaps atheism, run through the generations? Ask yourself what do you think you learnt about religion or spirituality growing up in your family?

Reflect: Draw your own genogram and reflect upon family themes. Interview the elders in your family. Often they are the ‘keepers’ of the oral history, sometimes knowing the family secrets, and this help you to understand themes and patterns that have shaped the family over the generations. It is a good idea to interview the oldest members of your family before they become senile or die suddenly.

You can think about this in terms of a hidden inheritance. Marcus Aurelius, the philosopher and emperor of Rome in the second century AD, began his *Meditations* acknowledging his debt to family members. This included from his grandfather “I learned good morals and the government of my temper” and from his father “modesty and a manly character”. Naturally this is not all positive “from my mother I learnt to lose my temper quickly”. This theme of

emotional inheritance is explored in the Book of Life website. It is important to be curious when someone (including ourselves) acts in a way that is uncharacteristic or unwarranted by circumstances.

Why are patterns important? If we think about such patterns in terms of hidden learning it is highly suggestive. A pattern can show common hidden learning of a number of individuals expressed in patterns in family life. This can be functional, such as taking responsibility, or negative in terms of dysfunctional behaviour such as violence or criminal acts.

Principle 4: A pattern in a family suggests the same or similar hidden learning.

Summary

This chapter has introduced the genogram. It is an important tool to assist you to understand some of the ways your family have shaped you as an adult. Remember to sketch out your own genogram and see family patterns for yourself. Look for opportunities to change hidden learning into aware knowing.

To Read Further

Monica McGoldrick and Randy Gerson's (1985) book *Genograms in Family Assessment* is very useful. While this book is now slightly dated it shows what can be understood from a genogram. Also look at the website <http://www.thebookoflife.org>

Chapter 3: An Individual Narrative

The story of your life. What happens when you tell your story? Who do you tell it to?

Think about writing a ‘therapeutic autobiography’ because it presents another opportunity to understand yourself. If you listen to yourself carefully, you will find important clues for hidden learning.

Reflect: Do you tell your own story or do others speak about you?

First Memories

This exercise is about you. There are many aspects to who you are. Think in terms of relationships, formative experiences, values and your search for meaning.

To Do: What is your first memory? What kind of memory is it?

Matt recalled finger painting. He thought he was in kindergarten. It was a pleasant experience of being with his peers and being creative.

Cindy remembered feeling frightened that she could not wake up her mother. Later she realised her mother was not like her friends’ parents, she was addicted to heroin, often “nodding off”.

These experiences are very different. Matt recalled a warm pleasant experience; Cindy was back feeling helpless and frightened. What hidden learning is embedded in each experience? A first memory can reveal a life trajectory. Could your first memory be an indication of hidden learning that has shaped your life?

Have you heard birth stories about yourself (Anderson & Foley, 1998)? These are the stories told in families about the birth of child. For example, was the birth considered a gift or a curse? This may extend to stories about the baptism of a child and, of course, on perhaps mixing more with memory. The stories of baptism, confirmation or religious conversion become integral to what becomes spiritual learning.

What about your relationships? We are shaped by our experiences with people, good and bad. Usually this begins with your parents, the foundational relationship, but include experiences of ‘first love’ or early attraction, group dating, pairing off, first kiss, first committed relationship, de facto or marital experiences. Write it with a focus on your emotional ‘highs and lows’ and try to get a sense of repeating patterns.

Principle 5: We are shaped more by earlier than later experiences, but both are important.

Relationships are where we hear messages about who we are. As infants, soon after birth, we can only see ourselves through the responsiveness of a parent or care-giver. Think about an infant delighting in a game of ‘peek-a-boo’ or tickles. The child is seen and sees him or herself through the response of the parent or carer. Psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (1971) called this ‘the looking glass self’.

Reflect: What messages did you hear from your parents? What was not said but was ‘in the air’? Such input can become part of your hidden learning. It is not a question of ‘right or wrong’, everything is believable when you are young and dependent on others.

Time Line of Significant Events

What events were important to you? Make a time line marking off the years you have lived. I need a long line with 66 years. Transitions are important:

In my timeline I would include primary school. Coming to Australia in 1960. Finishing high school. Leaving home. First attempt at university. Becoming engaged. Married. Four children. Ordination. Working in parish ministry. Qualifying as a psychologist. Later going into full time academic work. And so on.

Start with the ‘bare bones’ of significant events. Then add anything that occurs to you. Include successes and failures. How did you adapt to early responsibilities? Continue until the present.

Reflect: Sometimes our lives are profoundly affected by chance events. These can be fortunate or tragic in consequences. What happened ‘out of the blue’? Have you added such things to your time line?

The time-line can be added to an autobiography, which can be as extensive or limited. I have written my autobiography, well a limited one of about 40 pages, and I have shared it with Shayleen and my four children. I thought that this was a useful exercise though it received many ‘editorial suggestions’ from family members!

To Do: Make sure you record any traumas on your time line. It is best to know the extent of what you are dealing with. Only then can you come to understand early learning, no matter how tragic, and begin to find a way to recover.

Reflect: Think about the people you have been attracted to. What are some of the good things about them? What type of person are you attracted to? What have been the consequences? See the website <http://www.thebookoflife.org> In their view “love is a skill to be learnt, not an impulse that can just be followed”.

Questionnaires

Hargrave (2000) recommended self-examination through questionnaires. While this can be a simple information gathering exercise, answering a list of questions can also help you think about yourself. He suggested questions about parental discipline, how and when there was teaching about sexuality, and descriptions of relationships in your family-of-origin. He also included the following questions:

- As a result of growing up in your family, what did you learn about how loveable or important you are?
- In your family what was the most important thing to do or be?
- In your family, how did you know you were loved?
- What was the most important thing about being a family?
- What did you learn about being a man or woman?
- Was your family religious or spiritual? If so who were your models of spiritual maturity?

But this is what he thought was important, what questions most interest you? What expectations do you have for relationships? Think about these questions in relation to your autobiography.

Neil thought about how he got messages about being loved. He said, “I went to boarding school and my parents wrote letters every week. I really looked forward to getting the mail and learning what was happening at home. The letters were regular no matter what was happening on the farm. This was an important message to me about expressing yourself and being constant.”

Here Neil recognized an important experience: being supported by his family while he was at school. This led to a realization about staying in contact and “being constant”. This points to hidden learning as a child at boarding school.

Reflect: Think about your history of relationships. Can you write a sentence about what you learnt from each relationship? This can be challenging if you have had a marriage or a series of longer relationships, but the challenge is to ‘boil it down’ to a single sentence. Think about possible hidden learning that might confirm or contradict what you have experienced in relationships.

Infant Attachment Styles

Attachment theory has informed most approaches to improving relationships. An infant develops in important ways in the first year or 18 months. If a child’s need for attachment is met the child develops a secure attachment style for life. If not, his or her attachment is anxious in different ways. Think about the following questions:

- (a) Was your family stable?
- (b) Who did you feel closest to in your family?
- (c) Who met your needs?

- (d) How about other family members including grandparents, aunts and uncles?
- (e) How would you describe your earliest experiences as a child with your parents?
- (f) Did you feel basically safe?
- (g) Was somebody there when you needed them?
- (h) Were the persons around you reliable or sometimes present and sometimes not?
- (i) Did the mood of your caretakers change dramatically?
- (j) Was their behaviour towards you predictable?
- (k) Were they honest or did they sometimes tell you lies?
- (l) Did they make promises which were not kept?

Reflect: Think about your answers. Do you think your attachment to parents or carers was secure or anxious?

Here the example of Nellie:

Nellie described her father as distant, absent, busy, judgmental and self-centred. She then recalled an incident in which he was withdrawn, “When he got home he would read the paper. I got the message he didn’t want to be bothered.” In relation to his absence, “I was elected to give a speech at school. It was an honour and he did not rearrange his schedule to be there.” She pictured her father as busy “all the time, too many things to do to worry about me or my sister.” She remembered her report cards, “Which were an ordeal. I was always nervous if I didn’t have all A’s.” And about his self-focus, “It is hard to say it, but I think he only cared about himself. I remember he went on a holiday overseas by himself. We didn’t get any family time at the beach that year, but he got the trip.”

Then she repeats this with her mother. Then she considered which parent she felt closest to and why.

Nellie continued, “I was closest to my mother. She was there emotionally. I could talk about school and she would listen. I never found my dad to be patient enough to listen, even to the end of a sentence. I would have to be in real trouble for him to even notice me. Mum had emotional words, but not dad.”

Another question is when upset as a child, what would you do?

Nellie recalled falling off her bike and injuring her arm, “We thought it might be broken.” She continued, “My mother left her friends and took me to the hospital.” She added, “I was confident that she could meet my needs.”

The questions can now become more searching. What is the first time you remember being separated from your parents? How did you respond? Do you remember how your parents responded? Are there any other separations that come to mind?

Nellie said, “I remember I went on my first school camp. I was scared I might wet the bed. But my mother gave me my favourite soft-toy and it went OK. I was nervous, but I coped. Mum said she was proud of me when I got back.”

Reflect: These were significant experiences. How formative of hidden learning do you think they might have been? What learning was gender specific – ways in which males might be different from females emotionally? Who would be more likely to meet emotional needs?

To Do: Write out a list of what you blame your parents for. How much of this list have you managed to forgive them for? Can you make the shift from hurt-blame to hurt-understanding?

Attachment patterns are based on infant research. Basically watching how young children behave. It was found that young children relate emotionally to adults in a variety of ways. You can think about this in terms of how young children bond to care-takers. The range identified by theorists include the following:

- (a) *A style is avoidant.* This person is comfortable being alone. She uses her resources to meet personal needs. The basic assumption could be: “Better rely on your own strengths than needing somebody!”
- (b) *B style is healthy.* There is enough relational stability to use others or to rely on oneself in a flexible way.
- (c) *C style is ambivalent.* He needs to attach to others, basically having no confidence in himself to find the resources for self-regulation. The core belief could be: “You have to take care that people like you but you can never fully trust them!”
- (d) *D style is mixed (disorganized).* This is a confused style of attachment with little internal consistency. It is often present in survivors of childhood trauma and severe neglect. The mood and the behaviour often change in an unpredictable way.

Reflect: Do you have any children? Or young relations? What style of attachment have you observed in the next generation of your family?

Note: Attachment theory has been very influential because it adds a layer of understanding present behaviour patterns derived from early childhood experiences. Attachment patterns are considered to be foundational to later relationships: someone anxiously attached as a two year old is likely to have anxious relationships at 30 or 40 or later. Note that hidden learning is learned at a very early stage of development. It seems likely that there is considerable overlap, indeed attachment patterns are probably one aspect of hidden learning.

To Do: Draw a picture of your family when you were a child. Do not try to make it ‘a work of art’ but include your parents, siblings and any significant family members. Now think about who is big? Who is small? Where is everyone standing? What are people doing (activities together or alone?) Who are you close to suggesting attachment?

Principle 6: Your style of attachment will indicate how safe you feel in later relationships.

To read more: See Patricia Crittendon (2000) with her adult categories of attachment.

The Challenge of a Ghost-Writer

Think for a moment about your life as a narrative – a story. There are many influences. Maybe through reading this book and the exercises you have begun to explore this. What

people or events have had the most influence? In both positive and negative ways? But your life continues, so does your story, but if you were to author the rest of it with a different storyline, what would it look like? Imagine you have employed a ghost-writer to write it from this point on, what principles would you set for that person to follow? From these principles are there some you might follow? Can you set some goals?

Reflect: I would suggest a painful exercise. Have you ever thought back on your childhood and recognized times you felt some love? That is the easy first part. Now consider how much these experiences were also emotionally painful. This is an important clue to why our relationships often repeat in painful ways. For example, Charlie felt loved by his mother, who was overly protective. This was a clue to his association of love and being controlled, a pattern he endlessly repeated in adult relationships.

Summary

This chapter has introduced some practical tools to assist you to understand possible ways your family has shaped you as an adult. This includes first memory, birth stories, autobiography, time line and questionnaires. It helps to understand the four attachment styles: Avoidant, Healthy, Ambivalent and Mixed. Hidden learning grows from such fertile soil.

To Read Further

Patricia Crittendon (2000) with her adult categories of attachment. *The Adult Attachment Interview* (AAI) (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1984, 1985, 1996) from which some questions were taken. Attachment and God, see Granqvist, et al. (2010). Hargrave (2000) wrote *The essential humility of marriage*. Clinical application of the AAI (Solomon and Tatkin, 2011). The origins of negative emotions in childhood (Jacob, et al., 2015). There are many insights and useful self-reflective questions on the website <http://www.thebookoflife.org>

Chapter 4: Big Themes in a Life

When did you last see an original film from Hollywood? Usually we see more and more of the same: comedy, adventure, biographies, drama, tragedy, horror, sexploitation, racial, religious or cultural themes.

Any choice of what to see must surely reflect taste. There is no ‘right kind’ of movie ... or pizza. You may prefer Hawaiian; I prefer Neapolitan. So it is with movies, at one level it is just entertainment, but there may also be a certain resonance with a life theme.

Gary loved horror movies. He just liked to be scared and to feel the adrenaline rush. When he went to see a trauma counsellor, to deal with nightmares from a car accident when he was 12, he saw the link with liking horror movies, “I realised that I was trying to control what happened to me long ago. I would repeat being scared by something out of my control but this time, with each movie I saw, I longed for a ‘happy outcome’ instead of what happened to me.”

Game Plan

At this point in the book I want to encourage you to think about the big themes in your life. Not your family or those close to you, just you.

Your themes are ‘present tense’. How things are right now. Time spent doing this will not be wasted. Like intergenerational and family themes, we need to appreciate context for anything we might closely examine later. This needs a wide focus, to later pick out what is most important for you. We will later reduce the focus to schemas, or hidden learning domains, and then finally to finding a single sentence to express your specific hidden learning.

The big themes reflect how hidden learning can organize our lives in ways we often barely recognize.

Marcia was known to be a ‘drama queen’ to all her friends. She went from one crisis to the next, always in a state of panic, and desperately trying to manage the chaos of her life. She described her life as a ‘day time soap opera’ to her best friend Sophia.

Bruce: I think about my life and its central organizing theme. I can look back on decades of striving to be successful and more widely recognized. This had led to many achievements from professional qualifications, to books written and some measure of academic success. I am not trying to ‘blow my own trumpet’ (well maybe a little), but to look at what drives me. In the next chapter I will begin to look at schemas and you might speculate as to which are the best fit for me! I can also see that such striving has been a burden which I have carried for most of the last 35 years, and I see hints of a desire to sabotage myself as this would get me off the ‘treadmill of success’. While it seems bizarre I sense there is some perverse appeal. Much of this is in my own darkness awaiting self-discovery. We never really arrive in terms of knowing ourselves.

Reflect: If you were to ‘come back’ as an animal what would it be? What qualities of that animal do you share?

Highlight the Big Picture

To Do: Choose a word from the following that best describes you: tragic, comic, accident prone, dramatic, sad, depressed, success seeking, deceptive, etc. Add a few of your own adjectives. Select one that ‘lights up’ for you. Could this be a central organizing theme in your life? If so can you think about what might be the hidden learning that led to this theme?

Joanie was very suspicious of anyone new she met. She could see that her mother was over anxious and had been highly protective of her. But now Joanie was an adult she felt lonely and realized, “I am very socially isolated. It is like I have a filter and I don’t let anyone in. No one really meets my standards. But it is more than that: no one is safe.”

Tom suspected that he was a bit psychopathic. His last girlfriend had thrown this label in his face. He never liked working and supported himself with minor fraud, petty theft and ‘loans’ which he never intended to pay back. He learned a life motto from his father, “Screw them before they screw you!”

To Do: Think about your life as having a script. If your life was a movie, what kind would it be? Now imagine your 85th birthday celebration. If you do not make some changes in your life what will you celebrate then? If for example you think your life script has been tragic or say foolish with some comic overtones, what would you like your script to become? The first steps are to identify both the old script and the new you would like to write in its place.

Julia loved reading Jane Austen novels, her favourite movie was the Jane Austen Book Club and she dreamt of finding her Mr Darcy. She felt her life was a romantic comedy, mostly of errors and consequences. She hoped that she would find her ‘perfect match’ or her ideal of Mr Darcy. While she recognized this deep desire in herself, she also began to wonder if it was realistic or even good for her.

Reflect: If you follow the movies, you might have a favourite director: Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, Lars von Trier, Bernardo Bertolucci, or Clint Eastwood. Who has directed your life? When I feel at my most neurotic I think my life has been directed by Woody Allen. When I feel spiritual, sadly rarely, I would like to think God had a hand in it as well. If you have chosen your director or movie theme, and if you could change it – what would be the result?

To Do: Write a paragraph about the big themes of your life. Think of this as a ‘bush’, now begin a process of ‘pruning’. Remove everything non-essential, try to get to what is most essential and then reduce it to a single sentence. Is this indicating ‘roots’ in hidden learning?

Your Ideals

Think about the people you most admire. Name a few. You may feel self-conscious doing this but the point is not that you want to be them, just to learn from them. What is it about them that you admire? I admire Nelson Mandela. The traits I admire are his courage and ability to reconcile with his enemies. Now the question for me would be how could those qualities have a bigger place in my life?

To Do: think about the traits of those you admire. Do these qualities inspire you? Are you anxious at the thought of success? What might this suggest about early hidden learning?

Reflect: If you were on your deathbed what would you regret *not* doing?

Philosophical Meditation

I am unfamiliar with Buddhist meditation. I have tried Christian meditation where one goal is to achieve calm amid chaotic thoughts. Through a variety of exercises disturbing or unfocussed thoughts are pushed to the edges of awareness. In philosophical meditation the goal is also to be less troubled by thoughts but the path is different. Thoughts are complex clues to our development as people. So we bring these thoughts into awareness and through understanding find insight and a sense of calm. Problems are not removed but become manageable.

To Do: Set aside a regular time of say 20-30 minutes with a journal. Start with making a list of what am I anxious about? Or regret or excited about? Do not censor yourself. Just write down a few words and then go back over the list. Expand the thoughts into something you can reflect on and better understand, order and better deal with. Book of Life suggests “Imagine these thoughts as ineloquent and muddled strangers, who are full of valuable ideas.” So question these strangers.

To Read: *Philosophic Meditation, A Guide*. It is two pages and very practical, see <http://www.thebookoflife.org>

Principle 7: Themes repeat throughout life, reflecting hidden learning.

Conclusion

This chapter has had the ‘zoom lens’ on the camera. We have thought about the big picture, with a script, overall theme and director. The concept of philosophic meditation has been introduced. The themes of our life indicate hidden learning.

To Read Further

I have drawn on exercises suggested by the website <http://www.thebookoflife.org> Their perspective on relationships is influenced by psychoanalysis and is in my view highly realistic – though you might find it slightly dark.

Chapter 5: Exploring Schemas as a Path to Hidden learning

Schema Therapy: Mapping the Bad Lands

Schema therapy originated in the clinical thinking of Jeff Young (2003) and it has proven to be one of the most effective of current psychological treatments. This has been demonstrated in numerous clinical trials. This approach also leads to lasting change – even with the most unstable and difficult of patients. The focus is on what is largely ignored by mainstream cognitive therapy: the processing of troublesome memories, difficulties coming from childhood, uncontrolled emotional reactions and recurrent problems in intimate relationships. Indeed, it combines the depth and developmental theory of longer-term treatments with the active, change-oriented approach of short-term therapies.

What is important for this book is that schema therapy provides a comprehensive map of personality and psychological functioning. It helps us to identify patterns (schemas) created in childhood and adolescence. When you see your reactions and understand their origins, things will begin to make sense. And you can share this understanding with your partner as well. I will argue that understanding the ‘schema map’ will provide another important step to understanding your hidden learning.

Theoretical Note: Where does schema therapy fit? In what part of the therapy ‘library’ is this ‘book’? Schema therapy grew out of cognitive therapy, which has a focus on negative thinking. This approach was clear and easy to understand. Aaron Beck initiated the ‘cognitive revolution’ with cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) for the treatment of depression. This approach helped a range of psychological disorders, but it was not as helpful with personality disorders. This recognition of limits led to the development of ‘stronger’ therapies including schema therapy and dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT).

Schemas in Focus

While Beck referred to schemas, he used the term to describe clusters of negative beliefs. Jeffery Young went further. He found the origin of dysfunctional schemas in toxic childhood experiences. They stem from the emotional wounds of unfulfilled needs of the child and are a way of coping with negative experiences. This includes family quarrels, rejection, hostility, or aggression from parents or teachers or peers, as well as inadequate parental care and support. Negative schemas can be the result of trauma and neglect.

Reflect: Can you identify a negative childhood experience. How did you cope at the time? Do you think that this has influenced how you react to similar stresses today?

Principle 8: Schemas are essentially habitual patterns (of thoughts, emotions and behaviour).

But they are more than negative thoughts: “Things will never work out well”. More than rules: “Don’t get angry with your father”. At the schema level beliefs are unconditional: “I am worthless.” Schemas are like short video clips storing your memories including intense emotions and bodily reactions. They affect the whole person. Once activated you travel back through a time tunnel and find yourself in your childhood. You look at the world through child-like eyes.

Robbie had a disadvantaged childhood, shifting from one foster family to the next. But he was never any trouble - a shy and withdrawn child. Never causing problems. But on the inside he was deeply untrusting, suspicious of almost everyone, and socially isolated. He was unhappy and saw a therapist who recommended that he join a therapy group. Robbie found this experience excruciating, "All those strangers talking about the most intimate things." Gradually he began to notice that in group he felt unsettled, as he was as a child, moving from one family to the next and having nowhere that was safe.

Schemas are the basis of how we see ourselves and others. They are a 'meeting point' of thoughts, emotions, attitudes and behaviour, all of which may have different neural pathways in the brain but meet in a schema when activated. But while emotions are felt directly, behaviour expressed, there is a cognitive component not fully understood.

Young identified a comprehensive set of early maladaptive schemas (EMS) which were defined as "self-defeating emotional and cognitive patterns that begin early in our development and repeat through-out life". These schemas provide a blueprint for styles of thinking, emotional responses and characteristic behaviour for the child and later adult. A more severe schema can be distinguished by how readily it is activated, high emotional intensity and length of distress. While there may have been survival benefits of a schema in childhood, the pattern being the best or only solution at the time, by adulthood schemas tend to be inaccurate, dysfunctional, and limiting. Often strongly held, dysfunctional and outside conscious awareness. Repeating negative experiences lead to schema coping being more "worn and rigid".

Amanda was often left by her single mother in a flat on her own. She was always frightened as a child. She has tended to be clingy in relationships and no reassurance is ever enough from romantic partners. So sooner or later they all leave her and she finds herself alone again.

If a current situation is similar to a defining childhood experience, it may 'trigger' or activate a schema in the present tense. This idea of schema *activation* is fundamental to understanding Young's contribution. If a schema is activated, the past intrudes into our present awareness.

Sally has nagging worries about her weight. She went to a fashion show and she reacted to the 'stick thin' models. She said to her friend that she felt "bloated, like a beached whale" and was determined to go on another fad diet. Ken, her husband, was exasperated by what he called her "diet merry-go-round".

In this case an event, going to the fashion show, triggered an emotional reaction in Nancy. She was flooded by feelings of being defective. This also led to somewhat questionable plan-of-action. This is an example of schema activation and automatic coping.

Reflect: It is important to grasp the idea of activation. It is the result of a trigger. In this way a schema can be compared to a landmine. If there is a tendency towards suspicion, from a schema, then with activation distrust becomes overwhelming. This is why many problems only emerge in a relationship: As long as the mine is buried in the sand and no-one steps on it, you are not aware of the problem. But once you step on it ...

Identifying and Understanding Schemas

These four people have personal problems:

Nancy was abused in childhood. She has profound difficulties with trust. She has met someone who she is strongly attracted to but is very jealous thinking he will leave her for a “more attractive option”.

Monte is very self-important. He was recruited for a merchant bank straight out of college and it has “gone to his head”. He looks down on his less successful friends.

Barbara is too anxious to leave home, even though she is in her late 30’s. She said, “I have to look after my mother. She needs me. Oh, I know she is in good health, but I am a good daughter and need to be about the place.”

Brett is excessively hard on his teenage sons. They complain about his ‘put downs’ and how he embarrasses them in front of their friends. Brett’s oldest son has recently started talking to a counsellor at school who thought that the treatment was “abusive”.

Reflect: Another way of thinking about schemas is to see them as ghosts that will haunt you and your relationships.

The following list of individual schemas has been revised over the last two decades. We have also included brief summaries which are drawn largely from Young and Arntz. The schemas are grouped in a five categories, so called ‘domains’: disconnection and rejection, impaired autonomy and performance, impaired limits, other directedness and over-vigilance and inhibition.

First Domain: Disconnection and rejection

This domain shows problems with attachment. There is a link to a lack of safety and reliability in interpersonal relationships. If you have any of these schemas, you cannot rely on others. What is missing is any expectation of reliability, support, empathy and respect. You may come from a family in which you were treated in a cold, rejecting manner. Emotional support may have been lacking, perhaps even basic care in extreme cases. Caregivers were unpredictable, uninterested or abusive.

1. Abandonment (Instability) AB: The person expects to lose those with whom there is an emotional attachment. Important others are seen as unreliable and unpredictable in their ability or willingness to offer nurture. All intimate relationships will eventually end. She believes that her partner will leave or die¹.

2. Mistrust-Abuse MA: The person is convinced that others will, in one way or another, eventually take advantage of him. What is expected is hurt, being cheated on, manipulation or humiliation. Naturally this person is suspicious in relationships.

3. Emotional Deprivation ED: The person believes that her primary needs will either not be satisfied or inadequately met by others. This includes physical needs, empathy, affection, protection, companionship and emotional care. The most common kinds of feared deprivation are of nurturance, empathy and protection.

4. Defectiveness-Shame DS: The person feels incomplete and bad. As others get to know him better, his defects will be discovered. Then they will want nothing to do

¹ Schemas apply equally to males and females. I will alternate gender to be inclusive.

with him. No one will find him worthy of love. There is an over concern with the judgment of others. A sense of shame is always present.

5. Social Isolation (alienation) SI: This person has the feeling that she is isolated from the rest of the world, different from others and does not fit in anywhere. Often she will feel lonely.

Second Domain: Impaired autonomy and performance

You may feel that you are incapable of functioning and performing independently. You may come from a clinging family, from which you could not break free and in which you were overly protected, had a lack of support or have been discouraged from any independent action.

6. Dependence-Incompetence DI: This person is not capable of taking on normal responsibilities and cannot function independently. He feels dependent on others in a variety of situations. He may lack confidence to make decisions on simple problems or to attempt anything new. The feeling is one of complete helplessness.

7. Vulnerability to Harm or Illness VH: The person is convinced that at any moment, something terrible might happen and there is no protection. Both medical and psychological catastrophes are feared. She takes extraordinary precautions.

8. Enmeshment (undeveloped self) EM: The person is overly involved with one or more of his caregivers. Because of this fused relationship he is unable to develop his own identity. At times this individual has the idea that he cannot exist without the other person. He may feel empty and without goals.

9. Failure (to achieve) FA: The person is convinced that she is not capable of performing at the same level as his peers with regard to career, education, sport, or whatever is valued. She feels stupid, foolish, ignorant and without talent. She does not even attempt to succeed because of an abiding conviction that it will lead to nothing.

Third Domain: Impaired limits

You may have inadequate boundaries, a lack of a sense of responsibility and poor frustration tolerance. You are not good at setting realistic long range goals and have difficulty working with others. Perhaps you came from a family that offered little direction or gave the feeling of being superior to the world.

10. Entitlement-Grandiosity ET: The person thinks that he is superior to others and has special rights. There is no need to follow the 'normal rules' or expectations of society. He can get away with what he wants without taking others into consideration. The main theme here is power and control over situations and individuals. Rarely is there any empathy.

11. Insufficient Self-control (or self-discipline) IS: The person cannot tolerate any frustration in achieving her goals. There is little capacity to suppress feelings or impulses. It is possible that she is attempting to avoid being uncomfortable in any way.

Fourth Domain: Other directedness

You may feel that you always take the needs of others into consideration at the expense of meeting your needs. You do this in order to receive love and approval. Your family background may have been one of conditional love. The needs and status of the parents took priority over what was important to you as a child.

12. Subjugation SB: The person gives himself over to the will of others to avoid negative consequences. This can include the denial of most of his emotional needs. He thinks that his desires, opinions and feeling will not be important to others. This often leads to pent-up rage, which is then expressed in an inadequate manner (i.e., passive-aggressive or psychosomatic symptoms).

13. Self-sacrifice SS: The person voluntarily and regularly sacrifices her needs for others whom she views as weaker. If she does act to meet personal needs, she is likely to feel guilty. Being overly sensitive to the pain of others is part of the presentation. In the long term she may feel some resentment towards those for whom she has sacrificially cared.

14. Approval Seeking (recognition seeking) AS: The person searches for approval, appreciation, acknowledgment or admiration. This is at the cost of his personal needs. Sometimes this results in an excessive desire for status, beauty and social approval.

Fifth Domain: Over-vigilance and inhibition

At the cost of self-expression and self-care, you suppress your spontaneous feelings and needs and follows your own strict set of rules and values. It is likely that your family stressed achievement, perfectionism, and repression of emotions. Caregivers were critical, pessimistic and moralistic while at the same time expecting an unreasonably high standard of achievement.

15. Negativity-Pessimism NP: The person always sees the negative side of things while ignoring the positive. Eventually, everything will go wrong even if it is currently going well. She may be constantly worried and hyper-alert. She often complains and does not dare to make decisions.

16. Emotional Inhibition EI: The person holds tight control over his emotions and impulses as he thinks that expressing them will damage others and lead to feelings of shame, abandonment or loss of self-worth. This leads to avoiding spontaneous expressions of emotions such as anger, sadness and joy. It also involves avoiding conflict. Often he will present as very detached and overly rational.

17. Unrelenting standards (hyper-criticalness) US: The person believes that she will never be good enough and must try harder. She will try to satisfy unusually high personal standards to avoid criticism. She is critical of herself as well as those around her. This results in perfectionism, rigid rules, and sometimes a preoccupation with time and efficiency. She does this at the cost of enjoying herself, relaxing and maintaining social contacts.

18. Punitiveness PU: The person feels that individuals must be severely punished for their mistakes. He is aggressive, intolerant and impatient. There is no forgiveness for mistakes. Individual circumstances or feelings are not taken into account.

Maladaptive schemas hinder people from recognizing, experiencing and fulfilling their own needs.

To Do: Fill out *The Young Schema Questionnaire version 3* which is used to assess the most relevant schemas for treatment. See www.schematherapy.com The YSQ S3r is very useful short form for identifying characteristic thought patterns associated with the various schemas, but tend to neglect factors such as emotions, physiology, behaviour and motivation. Note the 3 or 4 that you score most highly on. You may have to buy the YSQ S3r since it is not freely

available. But you can also add a 1 to 6 score to the schemas listed above for a rough overview or fill out the 11 listings in Young's *Re-inventing your life*.

It is helpful to think about schemas as areas of hidden learning. Understanding schemas will help you understand what is happening in your life. The first three domains contain unconditional or core schemas. They represent the direct impact on the child and his or her emotional reactions. The two latter domains contain conditional or compensatory schema coping responses on the schema level as reactions to schemas of the first two domains. For example, you can sacrifice yourself (#13 Self Sacrifice) preventing Emotional Deprivation (#3) or develop Unrelenting Standards (#17) saving you from Failure (#9). Or you might develop a Negativity/Pessimism Schema (#15) preventing Vulnerability to Harm (#7).

Reflect: Can you use the above list to identify any schemas that might be operating for Nancy, Monte, Barbara and Brett (see above).

We see the following schemas in the examples:

Nancy has a Mistrust Abuse schema. She is not able to trust in her new relationship because of previous experiences.

Monte has an Entitlement Grandiosity schema. He has to be important and be constantly recognized for his achievements. He has an entitled way of looking at his new job as proof of his superiority as a person.

Barbara has Enmeshment and Self Sacrifice schemas operating in her relationship with her mother.

Brett has Punitiveness and possibly Unrelenting Standards.

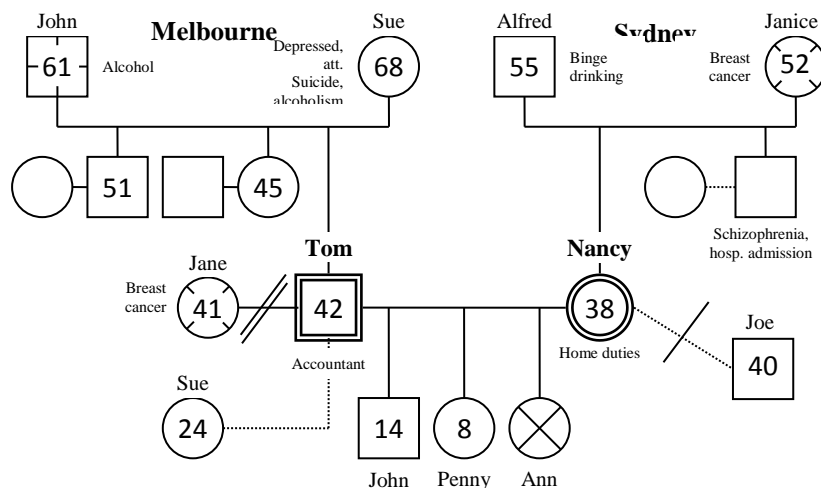
It is easy to see how such patterns will interfere with living your life. They are predictable aspects of 'who you are'. And the potential influence on your relationships is obvious.

Reflect: Think about the list of schemas and try to identify any that seem familiar to you. Also ask your partner or members of your family. Play a game of 'spot the schema' with each other. Watch a few TV shows or movies with schemas in mind (for fun not being serious, but it helps to familiarize yourself with the schemas). Once you have done this you will become much better in identifying schemas. So persist and make it fun!

Schema Transmission through the Generations

Schemas reflect a family's emotional history. So it makes sense to use the genogram, from Chapter 2, to track schemas. Can you see patterns of neglect, lack of protection, abuse, violence and possibly anti-social behaviour? This will indicate a chronic lack of regard for the welfare of children.

Identify, if you can, the most important schemas in each generation. Begin with your parents and grandparents on both sides. Can you see what two or three schemas dominated for each person? This provides not only modelling but also what schemas were most commonly activated. From the genogram:



Tom's father John was a Bank Manager. The most obvious schemas for John were Unrelenting Standards (surrender) and Punitiveness (surrender). His mother Sue was alcoholic and had Emotional Deprivation and Defectiveness (avoidance through alcohol). Nancy's father Alfred's schemas included Social Isolation (surrender) and Entitlement (surrender). His binge drinking was an occasional avoidance. Her mother Janice had Enmeshment (surrender) with her son who was schizophrenic.

This tracking of schemas will give a dynamic understanding of the psychological forces which have shaped your family and relationships.

To Do: Your genogram with coloured logos to indicate who exhibited what schemas. Can you draw lines to indicate influence on others? Compare the generations. What schemas tend to repeat in each generation? Is there a pattern of say Unrelenting Standards with oldest children? Etc.

Reflect: Schema vulnerability provides clues to hidden learning as a child. What messages were present in your family? What did you hear about yourself? What did you 'accept as gospel'? Did your siblings accept the same messages or believe something different? Think about what 'scripts' have shaped your life and relationships? Try a sentence completion exercise: I learnt this about myself in my family... (add your words). Repeat until something you add 'clicks' or feels very significant. Do not think about it just come up with words to complete the sentence.

Principle 9: Schemas are 'passed on' through the generations of family life.

Conclusion

I have introduced schemas in this chapter. This map can provide you with many insights into what patterns you have developed in your life. Schemas are also an important way to approach hidden learning, consider the schema as providing the suburb or domain of what you have learned.

To Read Further:

Jesse Wright and others (2006) for a CBT perspective. There is a useful discussion of positive schemas. Young and Klosko (1993) wrote the popular *Reinventing your life*. It is very useful

for understanding some of the schemas though more have been added since then. Also see Young and others (2003) *Schema therapy: A practitioner's guide* which has the full list of schemas and has a discussion of techniques in this therapy.

Chapter 6: Disconnection and Rejection Domain

Schemas are domains of hidden learning. You might think of schemas as fruit and hidden learning as apples. Basically one is a more specific form of the other.

Identifying your schemas will provide important clues to your specific hidden learning. So it makes sense to explore schemas first. So this will be our focus of the next few chapters. Remember when I likened your family history to a city, we are now narrowing the focus with schemas. Identifying your schema will be like finding the suburb of hidden learning, later we will narrow the focus to the street and finally hope to arrive at the actual house.

To Do: Find a version of the Young Schema Questionnaire Version 3 (this may require a small payment). Make sure it is Version 3 or it will not match the 18 schemas listed. Once you have filled it out and scored your answers, you will find your highest scoring schemas. An alternative, which is not as accurate, is to take the list and underline which schemas seems most relevant to you or those you know. At least this will provide a starting point. You can read what follows on all the schemas or you can be selective and chose what seems most relevant.

The domain of Disconnection and Rejection shows attachment difficulties in childhood. What if you experienced a lack of safety and reliability when you were an infant or young child? It is simple, you have learnt that you could not rely on others. You lack any expectation of reliability, support, empathy and respect.

Attachment is an area of profound early learning about who will meet your needs and whether your carer is dependable. Perhaps there is nothing more important when you are completely dependent on the love of others. This domain of Disconnection and Rejection is considered to be among the earliest of schemas to be formed. If you do not get your needs met *before* preschool age, say one to three or four years old, then the resulting schemas are likely to be in this range.

Reflect: What do you know about your early childhood? Did you come from a family in which you were treated in a cold, rejecting manner? Emotional support may have been lacking, perhaps even basic care in extreme cases. Who had responsibility for your care? Were they unpredictable, uninterested or abusive? If so then carefully look at the following schemas, because these may provide a doorway into early hidden learning.

Because these schemas were formed early, they are considered foundational. Later schemas may be secondary, perhaps more visible, but masking the real difficulty in this domain.

Val had a core dysfunctional schema in Defectiveness-Shame but she hid this with Unrelenting Standards. What people tended to notice was how much she expected of herself, but the real issue was her abiding sense that she was flawed.

Reflect: Do you think you have any schemas that might be reactive in this way?

Now we will look more closely at the schemas in this domain.

Abandonment (Instability) AB

Do you expect to lose people most important to you? If you risk loving, does a part of you believe it will end badly? If Abandonment is a powerful schema for you then important others are seen as unreliable and unpredictable. Your needs for nurture will largely go unmet.

Brad finally met the love of his life. He said to his best friend, “At last I can relax. Amanda is really committed to me. She loves me and wants what is best.” Unfortunately this opened the ‘flood-gates’ of his neediness. Amanda became shocked at how much contact he wanted through the day and complained, “I have a demanding job; I need the space to do it without interruption.” Gradually she withdrew in the relationship, and Brad reacted with more urgent demands, until she concluded, “It is too much, sorry Brad but I just cannot do what you ask. Or need. No matter how important it is to you, I need my space.” Their relationship ended a few weeks later.

Brad is a classic example of an Abandonment schema. He could only relax when he felt totally connected to Amanda. But then he wanted his needs to be met and any initial balance was lost, gradually his pursuing and her distancing became more polarized. Then the relationship became even more unstable and imploded.

Here is a picture of needy behaviour. This is on the stage and clearly there is a script to this ‘play’. But what is behind the scene? What is the early hidden learning that Brad learnt in his family? It is possible to have an Abandonment schema if you were too protected as a child. Paradoxically ‘too secure’. This leads to feelings of abandonment based on dependence (Young & Klosko, 1993).

Brad had a highly unstable childhood. His mother was single, very depressed and she was unavailable for much of his life. In counselling Brad realized the degree of her emotional detachment, “She was a good person, who tried hard, but was wrapped up in her own misery. There was no way she could respond to me as a child. Well sometimes, but not often.” It is easy to see that Brad missed a lot through such uncertainty in getting his needs met. Of the two pathways to an Abandonment schema, Brad’s early history was the unstable not the overly protective path.

Gail was over-protected as a child. Her mother’s anxiety was ‘contagious’. For Gail no one was safe until tested and proven, but then once ‘safe’ she tended to attach to them in an unhealthy way.

The Abandonment schema ‘raises the stakes’ in relationships. In a sense the connection becomes *too* important, with resulting instability, because of pressure on a lover (essentially to be a carer and expected to make up for what was missed out in childhood). A partner cannot always carry the extra load of dependence that goes with this anxious attachment.

It is possible that Abandonment can lead to a reaction, to live as if needing no one.

Darryl withdrew into an isolated rural setting in which he kept to himself. He saw no one socially. He avoided any groups. He said, “I want to live by myself, needing no one, it hurts too much to relate to people.”

If we think about the possible messages, then the following might be present:

- People who love me are unreliable.
- My needs are insatiable or ‘too much’ for any one person.
- I need to be projected by someone who stays close to me.
- I must be dramatic to get someone’s attention.
- Love needs to be intense or it is not love.
- I am safest when I ‘cling on tight’.
- It always ends badly when I love someone.

Consider: Do you think Abandonment might be a theme in your life? How do you react when your spouse or partner looks away from you and gives someone else attention? Do you recognize yourself in any of the possible hidden learning messages above?

Mistrust-Abuse MA

You have lived with pain, certainly emotional, maybe also physical. Through bitter experience you have come to believe that others will, in one way or another, take advantage of you. It is not safe to trust anyone. Eventually people you trust will hurt, cheat, manipulate or humiliate you.

The creed of Mistrust Abuse is *Don't trust anyone.*

Yvonne went to her local church Sunday School. Her father sent her “to get you out of my hair”, but she enjoyed the singing and stories. The attention of her teacher was flattering, it was nice to be given some attention for a change, and initially she welcomed his signs of physical affection. But this changed with uncomfortable touching. It was only later, as a teenager, did she realize that she was sexually abused. But it was a pattern of betrayal that had long been part of her life.

Yvonne was needy. All children are and that is perfectly normal. Adults take care of children's needs. But the adults in her life met their own needs - not hers. That led to a pattern of her being taken advantage of (essentially abuse). She became sexually active in her early teens, with many ‘one night stands’ and relationships with fleeting commitment. She came to expect it in relationships, “I know I will be hurt eventually. I try to guard myself by being suspicious, but I want to trust, it just doesn't work out well.” But being a schema it has affected all her relationships, “Even at work I can't trust my boss or fellow workers. I am sure they are talking about me and having a laugh behind my back. It is really hard to fit in when everyone seems out to get me.” Sadly she had no sense of security in any area of her life.

The Mistrust-Abuse schema undermines what is important in relationships. We need to relax, trust, to become vulnerable and to have our core needs met by another person. It is the way to intimacy and interdependence. This schema opposes any possibility of becoming close enough to find some mutual fulfilment.

Tom is a gay man who has become frustrated by shallow relationships. He explained, “I want to be valued as a person but it is all ‘foreplay’, a prelude to sex and only that. I know I have value as a person but nothing I experience supports that – it is just the feeling of being ripped off.”

Mistrust-Abuse leads to hypervigilance, never relaxing and always on guard for any possible threat. Anyone, who you would normally expect to trust, are the greatest threat because they can hurt the most. A terrible dilemma in relationships. And there can be a reactive position of over-trusting:

Brenda rushed into intimate relationships. She became attracted and was soon involved with Nick who was recently released on parole from prison. He had a history of violence with romantic partners. She was warned by her friends, who could see the danger, but she assured them, “Nick has changed. He has learned his lessons and now he assures me that he wants only the best for me.” Paradoxically this is an over-reaction to an Abuse-Mistrust schema, equally destructive and a result of the same dynamics.

The feelings include suspicion, guarded, violated, betrayed, and other strong, sometimes overwhelming, feelings. These feelings are ‘old feelings’ first experienced in childhood.

All forms of abuse violate boundaries. A sense of safety is lost. These boundaries can be physical, emotional, sexual or in the case of Yvonne her spiritual self was violated.

This area of hidden learning is perhaps the most ‘reality based’. Often it is reasonable to mistrust people unworthy of trust. You may have been abused, unfortunately many people are hurt by repeated betrayal. However, if by good fortune you find a completely trustworthy person, whom you love, you may find the Mistrust-Abuse schema undermines this with suspicion and jealousy.

Messages:

- In time everyone will use or abuse me.
- Being on guard makes me safer.
- People need to be tested to see if they are reliable.
- Being jealous keeps me on guard and helps me feel safe.
- I need space, it is risky for anyone to get close.
- Dangerous people can change if they are loved enough.
- It is OK to abuse someone because it happened to me.

Consider: Did you have a history of trauma or abuse? How suspicious are you of people? Or are you overly trusting? Think about whether you have a working relationship alarm system. Or out of balance? Is it too sensitive or seemingly not working at all? The extremes in this area suggest a dysfunctional schema.

Emotional Deprivation ED

Empty? You feel that your needs will never be fully met. Or the ‘the drop in the bucket’ but never enough. This includes physical needs, empathy, affection, protection, companionship and emotional care. Most commonly you will lack nurturance, empathy and protection.

Frank described a series of relationships with married women. He could see some similarities, “They were all somewhat withdrawn. A bit cold. I saw them as a challenge, and it feels good when we start something. But then I get restless and everything about them annoys me. Something is missing and I look for someone else. I see the pattern, but I can’t seem to break it.”

Young (& Klosko, 1993) noted that Emotional Deprivation is hard to define. It is not easily expressed in thoughts. And the feeling of being emotionally empty first occurred at a young age, earlier than words, and it is hard to express. So it is more like a *sense*. Maybe of emotional deadness or emptiness. This can be expressed as overwhelming neediness or being insatiable.

Sally was a social worker. She was committed to meeting the needs of disadvantaged people, “I am always the listener.” This was her way of covering her own neediness in relationships, “I suppose it distracts me. I understand being needy, and frustrated or even despairing, but at least I can do something about it for those who need me.”

Sometimes people express their needs in an entitled way – as if whatever they need deserves to be met by a lover. This comes across as demanding, as if their needs are sacred and should be honoured by all. It is one sided, “Only my needs matter.” If needs are not met, this can lead to excessive anger or rage.

The usual family background was one of deprivation. Children have needs and if these are not met, a sense of deprivation endures and will haunt adult relationships. There will be underlying Hidden learning generally about needs being very important but never fully met. Rarely is this conscious.

The over-reaction to Emotional Deprivation is in the two extremes of excessive demandingness or withdrawal. An imbalance in either direction adds to instability in a relationship.

Frank eventually gave up on relationships. He said, "I am sick of the pattern. It never makes any lasting difference. It is better to be numb." He started abusing alcohol.

Messages might include:

- No one will ever understand me.
- I will never get *all* my needs met.
- I will never be satisfied in a relationship.
- I will always be lonely.
- My destiny is to be disappointed. It is the message of my life.
- I can only rely on myself.

Consider: Do you feel like you live in an 'emotional desert'? When was the last 'watering hole'?

Defectiveness-Shame DS

There must be something very wrong with you. You feel flawed. Broken. And it will be obvious if anyone really gets to know you. Then you will be rejected. No one will ever find you worthy of love. Naturally you feel judged and found wanting. You might feel bad – maybe evil.

Steve felt anxious in a new relationship with Natalie. He said, "I really like her. And she seems to be really interested in who I am. But that is the problem, I want her to be interested, but I am scared s---less that she will find out how inadequate I am ... I keep dreading the moment she will find out who I really am. Then she will want nothing to do with me."

The origins of this schema is in early life with cold and rejecting parents. Perhaps punitive in unpredictable ways. Could this have been your experience with early carers?

The Defectiveness schema leads to feeling shame. Defects should be hidden from the sight of others.

Penny found being overweight a constant torment. She said, "I get so depressed that I cannot stop eating. Nothing satisfies me. Nothing really fills me. But the sting for me is that in being fat my hidden self is visible for all to see. I am defective, it is obvious and I can't even withdraw, so everyone knows my shame."

When she was a 'normal' teenager, Penny lived with the sense of inner defectiveness. When she began to rely on comfort eating, she quickly gained weight and this translated into a downward spiral in her mood. Penny felt chronic shame since her problem was no longer hidden, but obvious. She also felt envy for those who seem to have everything together.

There are implications for relationships. Extreme reactions are common. Some will be reserved or even withdrawn. This makes sense as self-protection. But others become aggressive in defending their vulnerability.

Robert went into relationship therapy at the insistence of his wife. She threatened to leave if he did not come “for a final attempt to save the marriage”. Robert was contemptuous of the therapist, attacking her perceived lack of competence, but she soon realized he was defending a fragile sense of self. He relied on counter-attack as a strategy. He had a shield which he thought protected him.

The two strategies in relationships are escape or counterattack (Young & Klosko, 1993). Also Defectiveness-Shame people tend to match with those who are highly critical. This confirms the underlying Defectiveness schema, but unfortunately it rubs like sandpaper and erodes any goodwill in the relationship. In extreme cases, driven by strong schema, a person will tolerate masochistic treatment which is of course highly abusive and further accentuates feelings of both defectiveness and shame.

Warning: If you have a strong Defectiveness-Shame schema then ‘chemistry’ in your initial attraction to someone may be very unhealthy. You may be advised to listen carefully to the ‘warning signals’ your friends pick up. Or talk it over with a therapist.

Messages:

- I am worthless.
- No one who really knows me could ever love me.
- There is something wrong with me, even my parents did not love me.
- I cannot change what is wrong with me. It is part of my ‘permanent self’.
- I cannot allow my inner defects to be seen.
- I must protect myself at all costs.

Make a list of your self-talk. What do you say to yourself? Is there a pattern? A bias?

Can you make a list of triggers that flood you with defective feelings? Other feelings may include inadequate, inferior, judged, and so on.

To Do: Imagine that someone genuinely loves you. How does it make you feel? Stay with that feeling. Now imagine that this person, who is attractive to you, has ‘X-ray vision’ and can see all your faults. Everything is laid bare, but the person does not withdraw. He or she looks at you with ‘soft eyes’, still loving you. How would you feel? Write about this in your journal.

Bruce: I have long suspected that my drive for success and recognition has been a mask for an underlying sense of defectiveness. It is very deep and difficult even for me to see. I don’t have the negative self-talk but I have struggled with feelings of grandiosity. Less so in recent years. But I think this a cover for the defectiveness script at some level. Interesting. It is important to follow such leads.

Social Isolation (alienation) SI

You feel isolated, perhaps different from others and not really fitting in. And always have. You feel awkward with strangers. Social chit-chat is challenging. You may escape to a rich fantasy world of your own making. Or to an on-line community, possibly playing on-line games.

This schema can be seen in many ways. It can feel like shyness. Perhaps you experience anxiety at even the thought of any social situation. Or it can be that you feel different or undesirable or unworthy ... or all this and more. This is not always crippling. Sometimes people with Social Isolation can maintain some close friendships, so it is more outwardly expressed, though usually experienced as feeling inhibited (even with reasonably good social skills). It is about *outward* relating or outward qualities, Defectiveness-Shame is about what is inside you. Of course some people have both Social Isolation and Defectiveness Shame (Young & Klosko, 1993).

Kelly faced every social situation with what she called “performance anxiety”. She explained, “I feel I have to measure up, but inevitably I fall short.” Her friends tell her that she is ‘aloof’ in such situations but “I feel flooded by something like terror.”

Bradley withdrew into a world of Dungeons and Dragons. He played this online and it occupied nearly all his leisure time. He found this both interesting and “safe”. He did not feel any need to change.

This can also be expressed through over-compensation. In this case a person will buy an expensive car, be highly attuned to social status cues, and do everything possible to join the right clubs.

Stan was invited to join an exclusive men’s club. It cost about 10% of his income. He willingly jumped at the opportunity to be part of the club, though it was curious because he never went to any event at the club.

The feeling might be one of disconnection, not so much rejection.

The origins of the Social Isolation schema may be slightly later than other schemas in this domain. Some children are different. Gifted children, for example, experience not fitting in. Or if their sexual identity was not the ‘norm’ then probably they were misunderstood. Or if a person was of a minority race. Or if their personality was different: more inhibited, intellectual, introspective, or inhibited. Some develop slower or faster, any perceived ‘differentness’ can be foundational to Social Isolation. Anything like this can lead to rejection and bullying. It is strange but some people get over the outward signs of isolation but retain the feelings of being different and not at ease socially. Old feelings remain.

Relationships may be problematic in adolescence. Dating might come slower, be awkward and of course, this can continue through the life span. Sometimes people with Social Isolation are attracted to opposite types of personality, over-confident and even ‘loud’ extroverts. Or part of the accepted groups as if they always belonged.

Jill relied on Bart who was a salesman, larger-than-life and the centre of attention in any crowd. Jill was happy remaining “in the shade” as she quipped.

Messages:

- I will always say something stupid and feel embarrassed.
- I need to keep my family’s secrets.
- I don’t think I have anything to offer.
- I am always self-conscious.
- I am different from everyone else – I feel like an alien.

To Do: Make a list of social situations you avoid. Think about your coping mechanism, for example do you try to use humour to feel relaxed? Or alcohol? Or drugs? Think about what is the threat. What is your internal dialogue and how may hidden learning be expressed?

Conclusion

Have you found some of the schemas in the Disconnection and Rejection domain describe you? It is important to be able to look in a ‘schema mirror’ and see yourself if you have such difficulties. But this is only the first step to understanding more fully your own unique hidden learning. Now I will look at the other domains but then we will move to more specific understanding of life scripts of hidden learning messages.

References

I have drawn heavily on Young & Klosko 1993 in this and following chapters on schemas. While this early book by Jeff Young is a foretaste of what Schema Therapy was to become in later decades, it does not include the full list of 18 schemas. Also it does not describe current practice, but it remains a very good description of most of the schemas. Very useful!

To locate the Young Schema Inventory Version 3 (see International Society for Schema Therapy, www.schematherapysociety.org).

Chapter 7: Impaired Autonomy and Performance Domain

The problem is ‘under-achieving’. What is most obvious is a lack of ability to function and perform independently. The family may have been overly protective, not providing real support and undermining any sign of personal initiative. This over-involvement could have been highly critical and inhibiting of success. Or it could have been so permissive and easy going that it was a form of neglect. But with one bottom line: It was hard to break free and become a person.

Now the specific schemas.

Dependence-Incompetence DI

You may feel inadequate to function on your own. You need the help of others. The thought of being ‘on your own’ causes anxiety. The areas in which you need assistance may include work, home life and even leisure. You may lack the confidence to make decisions or to solve problems or attempt anything new. The feeling is one of complete helplessness.

Ali seemed to evoke protective concerns in nearly everyone she met. She seemed so disorganized that even relative strangers would offer to help her sort out a problem. She would often say, “I am at my best when someone tells me what to do.”

Paul was classified disabled and managed to get a pension. The grounds were psychological because he suffered panic attacks. He relied on his older brother to help him go to the shops or to attend medical treatment.

In relationships the Dependence-Incompetence person is ‘lean to’ often having long term dependent relationships. There may be complementarity with a strong independent person as a partner.

Bradley was a house-husband which suited Mandy just fine. She was a senior manager in a government agency. He looked after their young children but they realized there was a problem when Bradley started getting anxious after leaving the house. He said he was frightened, “If something happens to me or the children, who will help?”

Betty was procrastinating about making the decision to get married to Bill. She said, “It is all a great risk. How do I know it will work out? I think I just need someone to tell me to go ahead and do it.” But the trap was that she endlessly solicited the views of others.

People with Dependence-Incompetence often are in relationships with ‘strong’ people who foster dependence. This can work, in an unhealthy way, but it is hard to escape this balanced but unhealthy pairing.

Some dependent people react with counter-dependence, which is an aggressive rejection of even reasonable or needed assistance. This “I can do it on my own!” reveals a sense of inadequacy.

Oliver had an accident skiing. He was admitted to hospital and found his dependent state excruciating. He kept rejecting hospital staff who were just trying to help him with tasks of daily living. In exasperation the head nurse demanded that Oliver see the social worker to “talk through his problems”.

Oliver had an overly protective family. When he made the break, going to university, he reacted with ‘fierce autonomy’ becoming his own person. But it was a reaction to an inner need to really depend on others, as he had as a child. He was always taking on new challenges and confronting his fears. But he couldn’t allow himself to need anyone.

The Dependence schema may come from a neglectful family. If there was no support for gaining the skills needed for adult functioning, then it is natural when these are lacking to depend upon others. This is a case of childhood neglect resulting in adult failure.

The feelings associated with Dependence-Incompetence are helpless, inadequate, lacking, feeling lost and confused. You probably feel trapped and possibly angry that you have to depend on others. Sometimes the feeling of incompetence in key areas is realistic. The avoidance of learning adult skills can be delayed by Dependence-Incompetence, so a person really does lack ability and has to rely on others. But having said that many dependent people exaggerate their incompetence and could assume more responsibility (Young and Klosko, 1993). Too much avoidance guarantees the need for childlike dependence as an adult. The trap is in continuing to depend upon others results in a lack of growth and an absence of autonomy.

Reflect: What are you most afraid of? This might include: death, insanity, poverty, homelessness – the extremes of helplessness.

Note: Some dependent people feel what might be called “dependent entitlement” (Young and Klosko, 1993). They feel that they have a right to have their needs met from those close to them. Hence if needs are not fully met, they react with anger and even punitive rage.

Messages:

- I will die if I have to make it on my own.
- I am like a child who is inhabiting an adult body.
- I look for help at every opportunity. It usually comes.
- I can’t tackle new tasks unless someone guides me.
- I will wait until I am assured of assistance.
- I deserve to be taken care of.

This is a journey of growing into adulthood. Try to exchange fear and avoidance for mastery. Start with modest goals but the challenge is clear.

Vulnerability to Harm or Illness VH

Anything can happen. It is frightening to think of all that can possibly go wrong. The world is not safe, friends may desert you, your health is fragile. Nothing can really protect you, so you must be on guard, constantly taking precautions. It is exhausting.

Frank’s medical practitioner threatened to ‘fire’ him as a patient. He continually researched potential diseases on the internet. He wanted ever more exhaustive medical tests and even medical procedures to explore what might be wrong. Dr Smith explained, “I have an ethical obligation not to over-treat you but you keep making demands for more tests. The problem has never been medical, you are physically well, but you worry about your health to an unhealthy degree. Your problem is psychological not physical, so I insist you see a psychologist.”

Maria would not go on a holiday because it was to a remote area of Australia. This annoyed her husband because it was something he had planned for a long time. She

said, “I will be too far from good medical treatment. You never know when it might be needed.”

The feelings of Vulnerability to Harm include apprehension and fear of the unknown which always threatens to arrive with disastrous implications. Anxious feelings may be pervasive.

Rachael grew up in a conservative Jewish family who lost many relatives in the Holocaust. Even though they lived in USA there was always a sense of threat, “It could happen again.” She had some superstitious behaviour to protect herself, “I always have to repeat a Talmudic blessing before I leave the house.”

A person with Vulnerability to Harm will usually form a relationship with an overly protective person. A ‘rescuer’. Someone who needs to be needed. Usually this is a poor solution because that person maybe over-controlling. So what begins with a ‘place of safety’ usually becomes a state of incarceration.

Messages:

- Something bad is always about to happen.
- The world is an unsafe place.
- I am very aware of physical sensations in my body, I must monitor them in case it is cancer or some terrible disease.
- I will be ‘a loser’, with no money and become a ‘street person’.
- I need to be in control.
- The worst can happen. In time it usually will.

Reflect: How long a list can you make in response to What if ... Was it easy to come up with ten items? Could you have gone more to say 50 things?

Did your parents communicate that the world was a safe place? Or scary? This might have been communicated through behaviour rather than words with excessive security measures.

The real benefit of overcoming your Vulnerability to Harm schema is the opening of the doors to the prison. You go free!

Enmeshment (undeveloped self) EM

Fused. It is hard to say where your identity begins and the other person ends. You are overly involved with people you see caring about you. But it is a trap because you cannot change, grow or leave the relationship. There is no room for change. Leaving home may have been difficult, almost impossible to be your own person.

Ray was still living with his mother. He was nearly 40 and the constant ‘butt of jokes’ from workmates. He was teased mercilessly, “Why not ring your mum and ask her help?” However he knew that his mother had been “there for me” over the years.

In relationships Enmeshment causes problems with spouses or partners, because they react to an over-involvement with family-of-origin.

Clare and Morrie were approaching their wedding day. But things were getting more and more complicated. Both families were highly involved in arranging the wedding and reception. Everything was a matter of conflict between the families who both tried to assert control. The loyalty demands on the couple were tearing them apart.

This is hardly surprising, that two enmeshed people would be comfortable with each other. But with an Enmeshment a person will find it impossible to become fully independent. In the

case of Clare and Morrie, neither could express their own preferences in the face of family pressure.

It is also possible that two people with Enmeshment schemas will be drawn into a fused relationship with each other.

Betty and Mike were very close. Everyone saw how much they depended on each other. Every activity was shared and neither could tolerate being away from the other for even a day or two. This led to problems when Mike had to be hospitalized with a chronic health problem.

Both had highly protective parents who did not tolerate any autonomy from children. There was never any permission to grow-up.

You can distinguish Enmeshment from the Dependence-Incompetence schema: Enmeshment has an outward focus: being overly involved with others with a lack of self-identity. Dependence-Incompetence I is more inward with feeling a need to depend upon others. Clearly both are linked.

The feeling associated with Enmeshment is feeling safe when connected to family or a lover or even a friend. This can feel like you are stuck but, as with Dependent-Incompetence, anxiety keeps you there. If you only feel comfortable it is unlikely that you will be motivated to get out of this 'life trap'. Paradoxically the more claustrophobic you feel in the relationship, the more likely you are to make changes.

Note also that it is often the case that a person is enmeshed with high level conflict. Some conflictual relationships are enmeshed. Even after separation, conflict can continue through legal disputes.

The feelings related to this schema can be mixed. Some positive emotions include being loved and cared for, not lonely, but also negative with feeling controlled, smothered, and disempowered.

Messages:

- I need to be close to someone if I love them.
- I always listen to the views of others first.
- It is important to not cause any conflict or to maintain conflict.
- If someone loves me they are very involved in my life.
- If I am myself I will no longer be supported.

Reflect: How much in the day do you think about the person you are closest to? Does anyone complain or tease you about being too close to that person. When you were a child, was your family at either extreme of too protective or overly demanding? Or too relaxed and let anything happen? These are pathways to Enmeshment.

Failure (to achieve) FA

Does it seem that you never get ahead? Or not congratulated on achieving something worthwhile? This may be in areas such as career, education, sport, or whatever is valued. Or your peers are doing things that you can only envy but not match? You do not even attempt to succeed because of an abiding conviction that it will lead to nothing. If this describes you then Failure to Achieve may be your schema.

Jake managed to finish his apprenticeship, just scraping through the final tests. He was glad to finally achieve something. But then his lack of drive meant that he stayed on the base level with his employer who refused to give him any salary increases or extra responsibilities. He watched his friends quickly rise in the company and to take on apprentices themselves, but not Jake. He was frustrated that he was treated more as a 'go-for' than a qualified tradesman.

Loral always had big dreams. She went to technical college and learnt how to set up a small business. Then she would try something new like Avon sales or selling advertising space. Sometimes she needed to make a small investment, and while she had the support of her family, sadly it was like 'watching a train wreck'. Nothing ever worked out.

In relationships this Failure to Achieve schema can lead to conflict.

Kelly and Will had only been married a year or so. They were saving up for their first home. Kelly was putting pressure on Will to go for a promotion but he did not feel confident, saying, "I am 35 and the director is promoting people ten years younger than me. I just can't seem to compete. Some are better educated, some more motivated (that is what he says), some more competent. I can't seem to get ahead."

Will was very practiced at one skill. That of avoiding. He avoided developing new skills, taking on challenges at work, and any real responsibility. He would procrastinate on tasks, get easily distracted and then end up making excuses. He was seeing a counsellor who wondered aloud, "Will, do you have any idea why you sabotage yourself?"

There may be a compensation for the Failure to Achieve schema when a person chooses a highly successful partner to 'bathe in the light' of the partner's success.

The family probably had a very critical parent, so that nothing was ever good enough. This develops what Martin Seligman called "learned helplessness". It is possible that one or both parents were highly successful which only reinforced a sense of failure.

Maddie spent almost all her meagre salary on clothes. She had good taste and dressed well, but this was her only talent. She remained a shop assistant in a store, naturally one that sold quality garments.

The resulting feelings may include feeling stupid, foolish, ignorant, inadequate and without talent. This is very much at the feeling level. The 'impostor syndrome' describes a person who has succeeded but still feels a failure (Young & Klosko, 1993). This person lives in constant fear of being exposed as a failure.

Messages:

- I will never amount to anything.
- I think I am inferior to most people around me.
- I will be found out as incompetent.
- It is more important just to get along, not stand out.
- I am a fake.

Reflect: What were the messages from family when you were a child? Were you encouraged or discouraged from attempting challenges? Try to see those situations that come back in memory. Was it realistic or just undermining?

Summary

The schemas in any domain are interconnected. For example Failure to Achieve and Defectiveness-Shame can be linked, as can Dependent-Incompetence and Enmeshment, or potentially any combination. So it is important to consider whether this domain is relevant to you, then to identify possible specific schemas, follow the connections in this domain and finally to articulate specific hidden learning. This is the process followed in this book.

Chapter 8: The Impaired Limits Domain

Bigger, brighter, better? This group of schemas is expansive. Beyond reasonable boundaries. These schemas show inadequate boundaries, a lack of a sense of responsibility and poor frustration tolerance. It is difficult to set realistic long range goals and to work with others. The family background may have offered little direction or given the feeling of being superior to the world.

Entitlement-Grandiosity ET

You feel that you are special and superior to others. I understand this schema, being one that has driven me for much of my life. So any *you* includes *me* as well. While I am pro-social, you may feel you have special rights and there is no need to follow the ‘normal rules’ or expectations of society. You may feel you can get away with something without taking others into consideration. The main theme here is power and control. Rarely is there any empathy.

I was fortunate being raised in a stable family. But with less nurture, I can see how my Entitlement schema could have easily become antisocial or even psychopathic. I just needed the tokens of success and the admiration of others. It motivates me.

Connie was a senior partner in an international law firm, “I worked hard, long hours, and took every opportunity to advance. I deserve my success. Those who don’t make it lack something I had: motivation, intelligence, dedication. I don’t feel sorry for losers.”

The feelings associated with Entitlement are superiority, impatience, being smug and having contempt for those deemed inferior.

The person with an Entitlement Grandiosity schema must maintain success.

Stan was the most successful sales person in his agency. Almost every month he topped the charts selling the most properties. He was in his third marriage, to Lenna, but familiar problems were due to his long hours and obsession with work. Stan worried about Lenna’s friend at work. He thought that she might end up in an affair. He said, “I have to break this cycle. I end up alone again and divorces cost me a fortune. What can I do?”

The problem for partners of Entitlement is that much is promised, little delivered. Like in politics.

There are inevitable problems in relationships. An Entitlement individual may have little difficulty drawing people, perhaps with charm and an air of success. The problem is when ‘the mask begins to slip’ as it must do in relationships. There are two forms of Entitlement according to Young (Young & Klosko, 1993): spoilt and dependent entitlement. In spoilt Entitlement people take what they want with no regard for others or even guilt. The motto is “What is mine is mine and what is yours is mine as well.” There was no history of mutuality or taking responsibility.

The origins of this schema are in experiences of being indulged by a parent - given whatever the child wanted. The child ends up controlling the parents.

Reflect: Do you think Stan was more spoilt or dependent Entitlement? Maybe it is not clear.

A special case of Entitlement is dependent entitlement. The person believes in their needs *should* be met. This is an appropriate attitude for a child whose normal needs are met by parents, but most people grow out of the expectation. Children become adults and assume responsibility for others. But something doesn't change in dependent ET. Childlike expectations remain. The origins of dependent Entitlement is when the child is indulged *to depend* on a parent.

Marie was indulged as a child. She was called their “little princess” and of course she expected this to continue in her marriage to Ben. She expected him to just know what she wanted. He complained about her assumption that he could “mind read” what she wanted. Her demands escalated and Ben felt overwhelmed. And then her rage reactions became an issue.

The irrational rage is the key to understanding this dynamic. The unrealistic expectations or rather assumptions, are the drivers for the rage. It may be experienced as a passive aggressive cycle by the partner.

Messages:

- I have unusual talents or abilities.
- I must fulfil my destiny.
- What I need is more important than any thought for others.
- Things go better when I am in control.
- I give only to take more.
- People should accept me for who I am.

Reflect: in most cases Entitlement is a counter-strategy for a deficit such as Defectiveness Shame or Emotional Deprivation schemas. Think in terms of what is behind this schema. Maybe as a child you missed out on a lot and now as an adult you make sure you get what is important to you. It makes sense.

I have often wondered about my Entitlement. Do I have underlying feelings of defectiveness? This is not obvious to me but I cannot dismiss the possibility. Sometimes I think I have largely recovered but then why keep writing books, including *Mirror Mirror* (2000) on narcissism!?!

Insufficient Self-control (or self-discipline) IS

You are highly impulsive. You ignore any barrier to getting what you want. ‘Delay of gratification’ is intolerable. Why suppress feelings or impulses? People give you advice about getting more disciplined. Your life does not have organization or structure. Maybe you avoid any feelings of being uncomfortable.

There is usually a lifelong pattern of being impulsive. Sometimes there has been a diagnosis of ADHD (attention deficit and hyperactivity). It is advisable to get a medical opinion to see if there is a biological condition underlying any impulsivity because in some cases medication can help even as an adult.

Walt's parents believed that he was over-active because of food additives. The cause was “red cordial” which they tried to avoid. However, as an adult he remained jittery and lacked an ability to concentrate. He saw a specialist and was prescribed medication. This was effective and the symptoms simply disappeared. This was not a ‘real’ schema but a biological vulnerability.

But most impulsive people do not have a biological problem. It is more a lack of discipline, though personality and life factors interact. One common difficulty with an inability to delay gratification is that it can lead to addictions: alcohol, drugs, eating, sexual acting out, adventure seeking. This fills the gap and counters frustration.

The feelings associated with this schema are usually intense and difficult to manage. Anger is most common, but the regulation of all emotions is a persistent challenge (and usually failure).

In the family the child was not helped to manage normal frustrations.

Billy was not taught to wait for his turn. This caused problems in the school playground when other children would tease him and older children would bully him. He could not wait for a toy to play with, which would lead to tantrums much to the amusement of the other children.

Reflect: Think about what happened with chores in your childhood. Who did them? What were the messages from your parents? Or completing homework. Good parents require children to assume responsibility and support them in learning skills as needed. If this does not happen it might be considered a form of neglect. Maybe one or both of your parents modelled immaturity in this regard. There was no lesson about reciprocity – you give something to get something in return. Both are important.

There are many, many problems in relationships. Jane Austen, the 19th century novelist, emphasised the importance of character. This is essential in a committed relationship or marriage. Unfortunately, impulsive people lack character by definition and may be immature.

Vella had a problem with the poker machines. She put the food allowance through the machines to the annoyance of her new husband. He did not realize the extent of her problem, he only knew that she ‘gambled a bit’ not that she had a problem that would interfere with putting food on the table. He was alarmed, to say the least.

Messages:

- If it is boring why do it?
- I can get by on my natural talent.
- I am just spontaneous.
- I can’t help it; it is just the way I am.
- It is more fun when I do what I want.

Summary

It is frustrating writing this chapter because I am not sure it will be read by the people who most need it. Few people with Entitlement, especially Insufficient Self-control, will read a book such as this. But others are affected by these schemas, usually members of the family, and maybe you are one of them.

Chapter 9: The Other Directed Domain

For some people only others are important. Not themselves. The message from childhood is one of sacrifice-self-for-others. Personal needs are barely recognized and soon denied. The result is resentment, after all “No one cares for me.” But there are benefits from self-sacrifice, of course, and these will be considered in some detail. Love and approval are the currency of exchange. A ‘people pleaser’ will usually come from a family background in which love came with ‘strings attached’. For example, “If you are a ‘good girl’ you will be loved ...” But again the needs of parents come first, not children.

Subjugation SB

You submit. It is a pattern which can last a lifetime. Conflict is avoided by saying “yes” to demands. Rarely is a hesitant “no” said. Your emotional needs get neglected by others and ultimately by yourself. You believe that your desires, opinions and feelings are not important.

Saying yes avoids a lot of conflict. This is the good news. It results in a more peaceful but an ultimately unfulfilling life. The ‘bad news’ is that it is emotionally costly. Usually the outcome is a pent-up rage, which is expressed badly. Think about the following examples:

Ken had difficulties in his job as a medium level manager. He was unfailingly nice to his supervisor and the general manager. He had a ‘can do’ attitude. He would agree to any and all requests. Ken was optimistic about delivering results. But privately he would express his bitterness that his efforts were not better recognized (and no raise in three years!). He was unaware of being passive aggressive. He let the company down at the worst possible times. Once he took sick leave during a tender process. The company lost the contract through his failure to deliver.

Kate was devoted to the care of her mother. She had rebuffed any male interest over the years, with her oft repeated, “My mother needs me.” Her GP was concerned that Kate was sacrificing herself to the increasingly irrational and controlling demands at home. She developed psychosomatic symptoms with back pain that had no physical cause.

These examples show how being passive can lead to unhappiness. Ken became passive-aggressive and Kate developed a pain condition. Their lack of realistic assertiveness ended up with problems even more difficult to solve. Such indirect consequences are usually the case.

Subjugation leads to a loss of clarity about the self. What is needed? Who I am? Life is not shaped by personal action it just happens. Ultimately there is a loss of self-confidence, even self-esteem, when others needs are always put first.

Feelings are complex in this realm. There is of course relief in avoiding conflict but also intense frustration of neglected needs and eventually the unfairness of an exchange which results in frustration and anger. Often the feelings include being burdened and trapped. Sometimes there are feelings of pride in caring for others and serving a high ideal.

In relationships Subjugation leads to peace-at-any-price. Sometimes the partner is selfish, demanding and controlling. This leads to a crisis that can become explosive. If two conflict avoiders form a relationship, there will be a lot of calm moments, but unfortunately the relationship may die of boredom with no one’s needs getting met.

Ellie and Bill's relationship ended with a 'cold death'. It had cooled to where there was no spark of interpersonal warmth between them. For years. Mercifully they agreed to separate.

It is natural for a controlling person to match up with a partner with a Subjugation schema. In this case the relationship pattern is one of subjugation. And the build-up of anger is something that will eventually threaten the stability of Subjugation relationships.

It is possible that a person with Subjugation will go to the opposite extreme becoming a rebel who reacts to any rules or even taking responsibility. This is an example of a reactive stance. Remember that for every reaction there is an equal and opposite reaction. So too in the interpersonal realm.

Usually the family-of-origin was ruled by a dominating parent, who set up the pattern of submission. It is a legacy of tyranny.

Messages:

- I must meet the expectations of others.
- No one is interested in what I want.
- I feel it is best if others make the important decisions.
- I am invisible, no one sees the real me.
- I don't act; I react.
- I oppose anyone and everything.

Reflect: What 'command' messages did you get as a child? Write down a list. What does this imply? What messages did you internalize as normal?

Self-sacrifice SS

You are willing to sacrifice. Principally yourself. It is your gift ... your vocation in life. You have strong empathy and are possibly over sensitive to the pain of others. You care. Others need you, because you see them as weak or incompetent. How would they cope without you? And you fix things. If you give too much, and there are many demands, you can begin to feel an edge of resentment. Sound familiar?

This is commonly the schema of counsellors, psychologists and clergy. It is a common entry-card to the caring professions.

Bettina has had a long and successful ministry as pastor to a large inner-city congregation. She was struggling with feeling 'burnt out'. She felt satisfaction with what she has achieved but also wondered at times about the cost. She had never formed a lasting relationship, saying, "I am married to my ministry."

Sometimes there is a strong ideal, as with Bettina, but this dominates and ultimately carries costs that are far from obvious. Bettina found a lump in her breast and understandably was very worried. She wondered whether chronic stress was a factor.

Feelings will include responsibility (for the pain of others). Guilt can be a primary driver of behaviour. It all feels voluntary, you chose to meet the needs of others. Young noted that people with SS are less angry than others compared with the Subjugation schema, but there may be some resentment because personal needs are secondary (Young & Klosko, 1993).

Zed is a medical practitioner in a remote area. He is the only doctor for 50 square miles. He finds it impossible to get a locum in and consequently refuses to take a holiday.

Family patterns may differ with Unrelenting Standards. At the healthy end of the spectrum you were not forced to submit to the will of others. You had a choice so Self Sacrifice feels voluntary. But at the dysfunctional extreme, you may have had a parent did not function at all through alcohol or drugs. Then the child has to take on the role of a parent, looking after younger children and even the parents. This may lead to ‘emotional incest’ with the parent over-disclosing personal struggles. Commonly the cost includes the loss of a normal childhood.

Reflect: Is your empathy a strength or a trap for you?

In relationships consider the complimentary pattern. Self-sacrifice people volunteer to meet the needs of partners. While this is the healthiest way to put the needs of others first, the needs of the giver are neglected. At times we all compromise, but when the pattern is rigid and at the expense of the self it leads to difficulties. Think about whether you found a partner with a Dependent schema? This is a natural complimentary style (Young & Klosko, 1993).

Reflect: Think about your history of relationships. Who have you been most attracted to? Is there a pattern? Do people end up needing you? Are you a natural rescuer?

Messages:

- I live to serve others.
- I give a little or a lot – whatever is needed.
- The world is full of pain; it is my role to make a difference.
- My needs don’t really matter.
- What God wants is most important.

Approval Seeking (recognition seeking) AS

You want approval, appreciation, acknowledgment or admiration. Personal needs are an after-thought. You may desperately strive for status, beauty and social approval. What others think is most important. Your value is ‘second hand’.

This has some overlap with Entitlement-Grandiosity schema but is slightly less dysfunctional. It is not so much a ‘puffed up self’ but consciously trying to influence the attitudes of others. This is probably the end of the Entitlement spectrum that I would most identify with.

Behaviour can be guilt-driven.

Vicky was a new social worker. She worked with the homeless and soon found herself overwhelmed by their needs. She wanted their appreciation. She was driven to work long hours by a sense of vocation but was actually guilt, “How can I take a holiday? There is no relief from the poverty my people struggle with.”

A pattern of submission can be to gain approval. There may be a sense that a person anticipates rejection, retribution or some kind of unpleasant reaction. Approval Seeking is preventative. It seeks to get in first by warding off disapproval.

Braddon felt Julie came from a better family. Of course Julie’s family agreed and it was through a ‘grudging acceptance’ that they allowed the marriage to proceed.

Braddon then became fiercely ambitious with his business and hoping to win their approval with the tokens of success he showered upon Julie.

In relationships Approval Seeking functions in a similar way to Subjugation. The mechanism maybe the same but the motivation is slightly different, those with Subjugation try to avoid conflict where Approval Seeking people are more likely to consciously please or influence the other. Both work at trying to keep the other happy; both fail in the sacrifice of personal needs.

The family communicated that love is conditional. This led to a style of ‘people pleasing’, almost winning people over. It is as if you are a politician, never getting elected but having to keep winning votes.

Reflect: Why are the opinions of others so important to me? What is at stake? Is it like the ‘air I breathe’?

Messages:

- I live to please others.
- I must keep you happy.
- I am miserable if you or anyone disapproves of me.
- I must monitor how others react to me.
- There is nothing more important than approval.

Reflect: Imagine you are in front of a crowd of the people who matter most in your life. Can you see them? What do these people want from you? What happens if you put yourself in the midst of the crowd? If you have a place there, are your needs now OK?

Conclusion

It is easy to see the close linking of these three schemas. There is a common pattern of the other person’s needs coming first and the demand of self-sacrifice. Subjugation and other schemas in this domain have a lifetime of reinforcement as a coping strategy. It will feel right to you, and this is good, but ultimately it is unbalanced and doesn’t work. Perhaps you can make some steps towards getting more from your relationships.

Chapter 10 Over-vigilance and Inhibition Domain

Here we enter an exacting world. Negative. Demanding. Inhibiting. Ultimately punishing. No place for spontaneity and play. It is all serious and grim. You have high values, for yourself and others. This may have come from the family background. Perhaps the constant message was one of achievement, perfectionism, and repression of emotions. Parents may have been critical, pessimistic and moralistic while at the same time expecting their child to achieve.

Negativity-Pessimism NP

You see the 'glass as half empty' and nothing ever seems to measure up. When you think about your past there is little but disappointment, the present is uninviting (you are not sure you want to be here) and the future "will not work out well". You ignore anything positive about your life. Maybe you have struggled with chronic depression. Never happy, sad but true.

This is a negative mind-set that colours everything in dark hues.

Pat seemed to go everywhere with a 'cloud' over his head. He worried about the global financial markets and how it might affect his superannuation, which was in the most conservative 'money markets' fund. His medical doctor prescribed Prozac but it seemed to have minimal effect.

Feelings are generally gloomy or vaguely anxious (because the future is unlikely to be happy). If feelings were a colour it would be in the blue grey range.

A reaction to a chronic negative mood has been called the "manic defence" in psychoanalytic circles. This is a seemingly successful defence against a low mood. Consider the following:

Sandy was the most energetic 'happy' person you would be likely to meet. She seemed to be always on the verge of euphoria. But this was brittle and when you knew her well, there was something artificial – it didn't quite seem genuine. It left a feeling of 'too much' and even a curious residue of sadness.

Sandy has found a way to compensate for a chronic low mood. This self-induced manic quality takes a lot of energy but it 'works'. The problem may become obvious after a crash, though some people can maintain their manic style endlessly.

In relationships you may join with another negative person, "misery likes company", or compensate with a happy optimist. With a Negativity-Pessimism schema it may be hard to make decisions. There is always doubt about whether it will ever be the right time to do something. In a relationship the partner is likely to be decisive, even over-confident.

Eric and Betty balanced each other. It was obvious to close friends and family. Eric always saw the risk in everything. He was cautious to a fault. But Betty had a compulsive optimism and was always ready to make a decision. Mostly this worked out well because they learned, through experience, to trust each other's instincts.

Reflect: See yourself walking through a dark valley, you can hardly see your hand held in front of you. Does this feel familiar? You see a glimmer of light in the distance. You react to this emotionally. What are your messages to self?

Messages:

- Nothing will ever work out well for me.

- I must never relax and remain alert to any possible threat to my wellbeing.
- It is not safe to feel happy.
- Now is never the right time to make a decision.
- There is safety in delay.

Emotional Inhibition EI

Emotions are private. You do not want to show any hint of what you feel. Gushy you are not! If you 'let them out' you will drown, become overwhelmed and never feel normal again. Control is the only safe pathway. Impulses are threatening. If you show your feelings the result will be shame, abandonment and a loss of self-worth. No spontaneous emotions are allowed. You value your ability to remain detached and rational.

Cecil was a three piece suit kind of guy. He worked as an auditor in an international firm. He was valued for his utter dependability, his rational and thoughtful approach to his duties. He said, "I am predictable. I know that."

This person may not have much sense of what is felt. It is more a hint of a feeling. This process of 'shutting down' emotionally may be so successful that nothing is in awareness. There is a kind of 'wall to wall' numbness. But there is a problem: having feelings is not a smorgasbord, you cannot pick and choose, one might be able to avoid sadness this way but there is no joy.

There can be a reaction to this schema.

Nicole wanted to feel. She was frightened of her sense of inner deadness. She tried adventure sports such as bungee jumping, parachuting and rock-climbing. She said it was for the "adrenaline hit" but it really was to just feel something.

In relationships Emotional Inhibition costs in emotional connection. There is a protective wall which frustrates the partner, so it is a profound cost to interpersonal intimacy. And that is the point of a loving relationship. Most people seek more than companionship.

Reflect: If your emotions were a person what do you imagine this person would be like? Can you visualize that person? What would it be like to have a conversation?

Messages:

- I don't feel.
- Emotions are 'big and scary'.
- It is not safe to have emotions.
- Numbness is familiar and friendly.
- I might explode and lose control ... even be violent.
- Any emotional expression leads to feeling vulnerable and being ashamed.

Unrelenting Standards (hyper-criticalness) US

The bar can always be set higher! You doubt whether you will measure up and you must try harder. This is a way to avoid criticism, you see the weaknesses in yourself first, find yourself wanting and then resolve to try harder. You might be critical of others, the "slackers", but you also give yourself a hard time for any perceived failure to 'measure up'. You know all about perfectionism, rigid rules, and sometimes a preoccupation with time and efficiency. It is hard to relax, enjoy yourself and maintain friendships.

I know something about this schema as well. For me it was seen in early career ‘goal jumping’. I enjoyed achievements but it was never enough, I had to strive for ever larger goals. Like a treadmill. It is only in last few years I have been able to pause and enjoy my life.

Pam is a high achiever. She has been selected by senior management in the public service for high office. She won a university medal in her honours year, then the Department of Treasury sent her on full scholarship to Princeton University. She was in a promising relationship but it did not survive. He was not willing to put his legal studies on hold to follow her to the USA.

The problem with US in relationships is that everything is subject to achieving high standards. Nothing is as important. This message is soon conveyed, but few partners want to be in ‘second place’.

Vince was a house-husband. He looked after two young toddlers, but he insisted on keeping an immaculate house. His wife was worried that the children were growing up in a “sterile environment” and did not have any permission to play or get messy.

The primary feeling is pressure (Young & Klosko, 1993). You may also feel impatience and frustration at any ‘resistance’ to gaining what is important. You may not feel comfortable unless you are striving to achieve something.

Unrelenting Standards can be paralysing. The standards are so high, that achieving them is impossible, with the result of procrastination. Paradoxically this is protective because there is no judgment on performance if the project is never completed.

Reflect: What does achieving your goals mean to you? What about the cost? How do you balance reward and cost? How do you rate the importance of relationships (especially if you have no one left to enjoy success with you!)

Jeff Young distinguished three kinds of Unrelenting Standards:

- (a) The *Compulsive* who keeps everything in perfect order.
- (b) *Achievement orientation*. This is usually accompanied with work-aholism.
- (c) *Status Orientation*. Success can be a way of connecting with others, seen as important, but unfortunately this can be a fragile connection (Young & Klosko, 1993).

Jed was always running on autopilot. Always in a rush to get tasks done. But no achievement was ever enough to keep him happy. He was a ruthless manager with relentless demands on junior staff. The only consolation was that everyone could see that he demanded more of himself.

The original family was marked by conditional love, and US came from trying to get some needs met – perhaps to rise above deprived circumstances.

Reflect: Think about your goals. Do you have a list? Consider whether you have to meet each one to feel good about yourself. What is the voice at the ‘back of your head’ in relation to these goals?

Messages:

- Nothing good is never enough.
- I know where I am going and how to get there.
- I must stand out from the crowd.

- I can only relax when everything is in perfect order.
- Goals direct a successful life.

Punitiveness PU

It is not easy to 'own' how harsh you can be. On others and on yourself. Maybe you try to hide it but it will always come out. Eventually. People do not usually measure up and it is up to you remind them of the consequences. It seems fair. When mistakes are made, someone must suffer. Excuses are nothing more than a 'cop out'. Forgiveness does not encourage a person to change. Sometimes you get feedback that you are aggressive, intolerant and impatient, or too critical.

Ray had the perfect job for his personality. He was a Master Sargent in a recruit training camp, "I am paid to swear at new soldiers! The country needs them hardened, like steel, and that is what I do."

The most common feeling is anger verging on rage. This may be justified as stress but the explosive nature is driven by more volatile emotions. There may be other hostile feeling such as contempt. You may also feel smug and morally superior.

This schema is one of the hardest to recognize. Almost no one wants to see themselves in this 'harsh glare'. Though curiously you may be even more demanding on yourself.

Sarah was a scary boss. Her personal assistant was frightened of her explosions at work. There had been a history of accusations of bullying by her staff, but management continued to support her because "she delivered results". The CEO said, "She is tough but it is worth the flack. The job is always done. I can depend on her."

The problem in relationships is 'wear and tear'. Aggression is like sandpaper wearing away any good will and eventually it can be highly unstable. Some Dependent people may tolerate such abusive control for a while, even a long time, but not happily. And unhappiness has a way of poisoning a relationship. The most stable relationship is probably with someone with a lot of self-hate because the punishing relationship with confirm this self-image. Masochism is another possible stabilizing factor.

The family of origin may have been controlling and abusive. There may even be an element of a punitive father or mother and the child decided to 'join them' rather than resist. This internalizing of high standards and punitive enforcement was learnt at an early age.

Reflect: Remember a time when someone told you off. How did you feel? Can you put yourself in the mental space of the person judging you? Did you or that person live with consequences?

Messages:

- I have a right to hand out rewards or punishments.
- People should measure up.
- I am the judge whether a standard has been met.
- There is only my way or the highway.
- I try to get in the first 'punch'.

Conclusion

There is nothing ‘warm and fuzzy’ about this domain. It is the realm of what Freud called the super-ego. This is a harsh and potentially punishing set of expectations in which, paradoxically, can hide high ideals. Unfortunately, such ideals can easily become punitive.

We have now concluded five chapters which survey Young’s 18 schemas (Young, et al. 2003). The metaphor of a city, developed in early chapters, locates you in an intergenerational family history. Everyone lives in this city, but your schemas or suburbs are unlikely to number all 18! Can you recognise a main schema, perhaps two or three others that are especially relevant to you? Now in these suburbs it is likely that hidden learning may be found.

Think about the two or three most troubling schemas you have.

Michael thought about Emotional Inhibition, Failure, and Social Isolation.

These areas describe schema vulnerability. They can also be understood as domains in which emotional learning has occurred. You can think of hidden learning as “what I know about myself”.

Michael sought to be more specific about what he had learned in each domain. He said in relation to Emotional Inhibition, “I’m not safe to feel emotions.” With Failure, the message was, “I can try hard but nothing will ever change.” And with Social Isolation, “My safety is in avoiding people.”

In this example, there has been a shift from the neighbourhood of schema identification to the “street” of a statement about the self. We will now explore possible streets in the next chapters.

Note: If you have identified a number of schema domains, then it probably indicates that you have a number of related hidden learning. Take your time and work through each.

Principle 10: If we have a number of schemas, this suggests different areas of hidden learning.

Chapter 11. What Street? What You Do Always Makes Sense

Hidden learning is mostly out-of-awareness. Unconscious. Think about a man searching for his car keys, at night, under a street-light. The keys are somewhere but not in the circle of light. Just outside. So how do we feel our way with no light to help us?

This chapter will introduce some techniques. Recall your most active schemas. These are the suburbs in which your hidden learning is located. The goal now is to arrive at the street of your hidden learning. The following techniques are designed to help you do just that:

Step-Back Technique: How we Act

The consequences of hidden learning are for all to see. These under in the street light of our awareness. This underlines a vital principle, but an even more important clue. Cause and effect, essentially. All behaviour makes sense. At least emotionally. First observe.

Charlie knew he had Insufficient Self-control. He was tired of losing money through gambling. He knew he had a problem but felt unable to change his behaviour.

On the surface this behaviour is irrational.

Charlie had years of gambling experience. He knew that there was only one certain outcome, “The bookies always win.” He might have a big win on a race, even a big day, but eventually “I end up broke and borrowing money, losing important relationships, even my children refuse to talk to me.”

Charlie did not lack insight. Gambling was a no-win activity. He would lose eventually and it had impoverished every important area of his life. This is what he saw but it did not make rational sense.

The next step. Ask yourself what hidden learning would make this irrational problem behaviour ‘logical’? Freely speculate.

Charlie remembered that his mother always made him feel special and she would say “The rules don’t apply to you. You were ‘born lucky’.” She also said, “You have the Midas touch.” He thought about this and suddenly his gambling made sense. He was acting to fulfil what his mother saw as his destiny and even though she had died years ago, he was living her ‘lucky script’ for his life.

In Charlie’s case the behaviour, seemingly irrational, was the result of prior hidden learning.

Reflect: Apply this exercise to your life. Identify a behaviour that seems irrational to you. What might be the hidden learning *cause* of the *effect* you now live with?

Think about your most troubling schema, what unwanted behaviour comes from that schema? This is the clue, Step Back.

Principle 11: The discovery of hidden learning involves looking from visible effects to hidden causes.

Back to Act 1

This is similar to Stepping Back. But it is another approach, less deductive and more imaginative:

- (a) Think of your life as a play with various acts. You are on the stage, the star of the play, naturally it is your life. You are in Act 2 or Act 3 (you have probably had some significant transitions). What kind of play is it so far: tragedy, comedy, romantic, adventure, or melodrama?
- (b) Act 1 is the realm of hidden learning. This is when the play began and set the trajectory of your life. The director of your play must have had a set of instructions to follow. All directors do. Try to reconstruct the script of the play, from what you know about later acts. For example, “things always go wrong in the end” if your life is has a tragic quality. Or “I feel most alive when I go from crisis to crisis” which may play out as a melodrama. Or “the funniest things always happen to me” if it is a comedy.

No behaviour is random. In life or on a stage. Note that all plays have some kind of script. So it makes sense to begin with the play, as you have lived it, to try to work back to the script.

Candy was emotionally abused by her volatile mother. It lasted much of her primary school years. She was aware of her Defectiveness (DS) schema, internalizing the abusive messages, and how she attempted to get control of her eating, “hoping I could find a way to have more control in my life.” The DS schema was the suburb, “There is something wrong with me. I am not normal.” But why the anorexia? Because it was something she could control in her life. If we work back from this, we can speculate a message similar to “I must be in control to be safe.” She realized that if she could not control her life, then she could at least control her body through restricted eating. This gave an illusion of control. It is more specific than just feeling defective. The need for control is the street in the suburb of Defectiveness Shame.

To Do: Try this imaginative exercise. Note that the script to the director was Candy must be in control of her life – at least in one area.

Adult-Child Dialogue

This is an extended journal exercise. Think about a time you felt upset as a child.

Now:

- (a) See yourself as a child feeling upset. What age are you? Is the child sad or anxious or angry? As an adult what would you say to yourself as a child? (Try not to be critical or judgmental. If you find yourself in that role stop the exercise and come back to it only when you can be self-compassionate). Write a few paragraphs of positive things you would like to communicate (use simple words that a child of the age you see can understand).
- (b) Now respond to those words as the child. What would you say back? What are you thinking as a child? What have you learnt in life so far? How do you expect your life to work out?
- (c) Reply as the adult.
- (d) Continue as the child.
- (e) And back and forth until you feel you have arrived at better understanding of what might be part of your hidden learning.

Do any important themes emerge in the adult or child parts of the dialogue? What might this suggest about early hidden learning? It is important to step back and look around. What do you see?

Gary thought about a time when he was bullied at school. He was in grade 5. He said to his child-self, “It was not your fault. You are just a kid. They ganged up on you.” Gary as child, “Yes I know it is not fair. I can’t understand why my teacher or other adults don’t protect me better. Why am I left on my own?” Gary as adult, “Sometimes adults don’t do a very good job at protecting children. It is just that way, sorry, and children get let down. What have you learned?” Gary as child, “I have to depend on myself. I can survive.” This was the basis of his Social Isolation schema. Gary as adult, “That is good. Anything else?” Gary as child, “I kept my anger in. I also learned that one day I will be big and I get them back.” Gary as adult, “Oh, I am surprised. But it makes sense of why I have been mean to employees at times in my career.” He knew he also had a Punitive schema.

This shows some mixed hidden learning. Gary learnt to be self-reliant, and that is in some respects good, but also to ‘pay-back’ some of the pain he suffered as a child. He learned how to misuse power. He was more specific in both schema areas, arriving at the street in both Social Isolation and Punitiveness. He was well on his way to discovering his hidden learning.

Allow yourself to be surprised in doing this exercise. Continue the exercise until you discover something in the dialogue between your adult and child self.

Reflect: What was the source of your early messages in life? Your mother or father or someone else? Do you think these messages, incorporated into early hidden learning, have been positive or negative? Maybe mixed. It can help to visualize the person who gave negative messages, see them speaking to you and answer back forcefully. Can you ask them to move back from you, even out of your sight? Leaving the room. How does this feel? It is helpful to stop the way some of the messages have been internalized and incorporated into your hidden learning.

Trauma Learning

You may have experiences in which your life has been in danger. Or you felt helpless and suffered violence or abuse. Trauma experiences ‘turn up the volume’ on hidden learning. We hear the messages loud and clear. And the learning lasts a life time. So we need to recognize and manage what was learned about the world and self in the ‘nightmares’ of life.

Tian was a refugee from Vietnam. She came with her family as one of the ‘boat people’ when Australia was more welcoming of refugees. There was a terrifying experience with armed pirates, who stopped the boat and robbed passengers. Tian asked herself what she learnt as a child. She realized, “It was an early message that the world is not safe. Even my parents cannot make it safe.” She identified a pattern of seeking safe but ‘boring’ relationships.

To Do: Make a list of all traumatic incidents you recall as a child or adult. Unfortunately, the list may be long. Write them down. Rate each in terms of how traumatic it was with 1-10/10 with 10 being the worst.

If you have had some training in using visualization, perhaps with schema therapy, I would encourage you to meet your child needs in the situation. For example, in seeing yourself as a child, visualize a trusted adult explaining the situation and giving comfort with physical affection. This is a good start because it can change the effect of the injury. But go further. Ask yourself what you as child would have learnt through that experience? Consider and ask yourself how strongly you believe this about yourself. Score it on a 1-10/10 scale with 10 being ‘absolutely true.’ This is likely to be a source of hidden learning.

Brad was sexually abused by his uncle. As an adult he saw this realistically, “My uncle was a predator. He saw that I was vulnerable.” The abuse happened repeatedly. When Brad complained to his mother, she said, “Don’t be ridiculous, your uncle is just being affectionate.” Brad was conflicted about liking the attention but hating the abuse.

Brad led a life of self-destructive promiscuity, “Searching for scraps of love.” What was the message behind this? Brad knew that he felt emotionally empty, had a schema of Emotional Deprivation. He thought the message might be, “I get what I can when I can. It is better than nothing.” Unfortunately, he also attributed to himself some seductive power as a child, which was nonsense, of course, but this comprised a destructive hidden learning, and added another dimension to seeking temporary relationships in which sometimes he was ‘in charge’ and abusive.

Principle 12: Trauma and highly distressing experiences can form and empower hidden learning.

Vantage Point

We have seen that persisting problems are clues to hidden learning. This is a way of getting to what is behind the problem.

Imagine: You get up tomorrow and a miracle has occurred. The problem that you have struggled with has now completely gone. You are not even tempted to do the behaviour that has troubled you.

Suzie struggled with constant health worries. Vulnerability to Harm was the schema that she rated highest on the questionnaire. She was constantly going to her medical practitioner and having countless tests even against medical opinion. So she imagined herself waking up the next day without feeling her health was in peril. Initially she felt a wave of relief. But then she noticed that she felt empty. She recalled the same feeling from her childhood. She would go to her mother and complain about feeling unwell, and her mother would always respond, “Poor dear. Of course you can stay home from school. It will just be the two of us at home.” It felt less lonely and she got attention.

Suzie could see the meaning of the behaviour in its absence, “I needed attention. This was the one way I knew worked. And it still does from my doctor.”

Reflect: You may have heard the axiom, “Nature abhors a vacuum.” We are allowing this to happen when we create a vacuum by the absence of the symptom, its reason for its presence becomes more obvious!

Radical Self-Inquiry

Here are some thoughts that ‘dig up the ground’ of your assumptions in life. The idea is to ask yourself some really difficult questions but by ‘the back door’. The less obvious way. This can also be applied to your relationship.

Exercise: Think of a firmly held view that you have of a family member. Think of something controversial, something that your friends have questioned. Then visualize that person, who may be your father or mother, or a sibling, and say to them in your imagination the *opposite* of what you have always believed to be true. How do you react? How do they react?

Cindy thought her father was very supportive of her. Her father left her mother when Cindy was age 8, but he continued to see her for part of school holidays. She always thought he was generous to her, making time in his busy schedule and occasionally taking her on trips. So she visualized him and said, “Dad you were selfish, just as my friends thought and my mother always said.” Surprisingly, this felt true when she said it. She began to question assumptions long held about her family.

Think of a relational difficulty and then ask the *hard question*: What understanding must I have to make that difficulty more important to have than not have? The following questions from Bruce Ecker may help:

1. What does that difficulty do for you or the relationship? What does it prevent you from having to do? Is it an important need or priority validated or pursued? What would it mean for your relationship if this difficulty never went away?
2. How is that difficulty a *success* rather than a *failure*? Is the problem in some way a solution to an unacknowledged problem? Who does it matter to, perhaps in some way more than to you?
3. What are the unwelcome or dreaded consequences that would result from living without that relationship difficulty? This is the price you will have to pay for a change.

These questions are not easy to ask and especially not easy to answer. Approach this task with a “beginner’s mind” (Ecker, 1996). Do not assume you have the answers, just start with questions that uncover layers of meaning – like a curious archaeologist digging in a site.

To Do: If you were to teach me to have your problem, how would you do that? How would you justify that it would be a good idea for me to have the same difficulty?

As you begin with the first clues to unlock your relationship mystery, write them down and then make them headings to expand in your journal. Visualize a setting in which individual truths are played out. Pay attention to your emotions. This is the arena of emotional truth – you are finally where answers are possible!

Areas of Hidden Learning

Bruce Ecker has outlined areas of emotional knowing based on internalized messages and beliefs. This gives an overall picture of where hidden learning might be located:

- (a) *Ends* “My wife will get obese, all women are like my mother who cares more about food than me.”

- (b) *Roles* “If my husband becomes irritable, it is my job to protect the children.”
- (c) *Causes* “It is my fault if my husband does not come home for dinner. I must be more attractive, to draw him home.”
- (d) *Nature of self, others and world* “There are two kinds of people. Those who are creative and chaotic; those who are boring but organized.”
- (e) *How to know* “The way I know I am a good person is to get promoted and earn more money.”
- (f) *Values* “Doing what God wants is good; doing what I want is bad. I must sacrifice myself for the church.”

Such underlying assumptions powerfully structure how we see reality. This is endlessly played out in life and relationships. Unless we reveal and question them they keep us in our life traps.

Reflect: Think about the above areas. Does anything give a hint of what might be valuable to work on? This might open up another area for possible exploration using the techniques introduced in this chapter.

The Developmental Dimension of Hidden Learning

Hidden learning is learnt at a specific age. This is highly adaptive. It makes sense to pick up cues and adapt to the world as quickly as possible. This is why we so naturally form schemas and develop hidden learning from birth. The learning begins, often in a way without words, and then continues with reinforcement at later stages.

Early hidden learning is characterized by the ‘how we think’ at that age. Or what resources we have at such an age. For example, hidden learning tends to be:

- (a) Isolated and relatively unintegrated into normal thought patterns.
- (b) Hard to put into words especially if prior to language.
- (c) Even less rational or reality based.
- (d) Dictatorial, making absolute demands.

At later ages these qualities are modified. For example, if a tyrannical parent demands unquestioning obedience and this is learnt as a toddler, then hidden learning will clearly have such characteristics.

Nancy was obedient to authority figures. No disputing their authority. She did not give a thought to herself. She knew that any safety was dependent upon pleasing those who had the power in her life. She began to realize this when she was able to identify her schema domains of Submission and Approval Seeking. What began with her father continued with her abusive husband.

Now compare this to Bradley who had a similar step-parent arrive to be his new ‘father’ when he was 13 years old.

Bradley was terrorized by his violent step-father but he learned to be submissive externally. Inside he seethed with rage. He was more passive-aggressive, trying to sabotage his father at every opportunity. This was a conscious reaction and better integrated into his more adult sense of self.

Reflect: What is different about what Nancy and Bradley learnt in childhood? The demands were similar, but their capacity to respond differed. Can you see how it indicates the ways in which children learn what is true for them at different ages? This will have an influence on the way hidden learning is worded.

Principle 13: The character of hidden learning is to some degree ‘set’ by the age it was learned.

Conclusion

Together we have been searching for the street of hidden learning in your schema suburbs, and beyond in radical self-inquiry. In this chapter I have suggested a number of ways to step back, to dialogue with your child self or to inquire about past experiences. This provides an imaginative or speculative way of reconstructing hidden learning. We have also considered some general truths of hidden learning, perhaps theoretical but ultimately practical because it will help us to focus.

To Read Further

Ecker & Hulley (1996) and Ecker and colleagues (2013).

Chapter 12. The House (at last!)

Hidden learning has its surprises.

One surprise is that unconscious learning is most powerful when you don't hear it. You just obey. In often irrational and self-destructive ways! I hope this startles you because it is a revolutionary insight.

Erica kept getting in romantic relationships with men with alcohol problems. She understood that this was familiar pattern because her father died of alcohol dependence. She asked, "Why do I keep getting drawn to men with that problem?" She was obeying a voice she could not hear. At least now she was curious as to what it might be saying, since she could see the consequences of *obeying* that voice.

The second surprise is that that voice wants to speak to you (so you can hear the message). This long silenced voice longs to speak. The goal is to find ways for it to talk and you to listen. Sound easy? Well, surprisingly easy.

Principle 14: Hidden learning wants to be put into words – to be heard.

And the final surprise is that once heard, hidden learning can be unlearned and a healthier message re-learned. This is called 'memory reconsolidation'.

Naming into Awareness

How do we hear what hidden learning has to say? I have introduced you to a number of techniques such as Step Back, Act 1, Adult-Child Dialogue, Vantage Point and Radical Self-inquiry. Ecker (1996) wrote about "naming into awareness" which to some degree all these approaches follow. I have found the most effective way to articulate hidden learning is sentence completion.

Natalie saw her therapist. He tried to help her with hidden learning. She said that she had low self-esteem, "I really hate myself." He said, "On a scale of 1-10/10, rate how true this statement is: I am worthless." Natalie quickly affirmed, "10/10!" He answered, "OK, now shift to a sentence completion, I am worthless because..." She said, "I don't deserve to exist."

She explored with her therapist the emphasis of her family on attractiveness. She said that she only had value if they were proud of how she looked. Her therapist suggested that she rate how true the following statements are about you: I must be beautiful or they will not notice me. (9/10) I only deserve to exist if they can say they are proud of how I look. (10/10)

Identify a relational difficulty and then try the following exercise:

It is necessary for me to ... for the following reason...

Brett tried this after a session in which his wife complained about his chronic lateness from work. He was reacting to Enmeshment and Subjugation schemas. He said, "I must be late because I don't want to face Sally. I am too passive to ask for what I want in this relationship so it is best for me to withdraw no matter how much unhappiness it causes. This is my way of making a protest!"

Vantage Point: Sally approached the problem it from a Vantage Point: as if the problem has completely disappeared.

Sally thought about how she would feel if Brett came home on time like ‘clock work’, “Yes I can see him coming through the front door every night at 6pm. At first it seemed like a relief, but then I feel myself becoming uneasy. It is too regular, boring, maybe I want the uncertainty of when he will come in the door.” She then added sentence completion, saying “I need Brett to be late because ...” Then she discovered, “I need to blame him. Only making him to be at fault can justify my despair about this marriage.” Her mother used to blame her father, so she began to think about why this might be important to her.

Sally and Brett found that the ‘problematic’ behaviour was *needed* by them both. It served different unconscious agendas that stabilized their relationship but caused distress. This is common with relationship problems. Now, with this new understanding, both could begin to address the real issues in their relationship. The first step is to realize: there is a part of me that ‘is not on board’ with making the changes in the relationship.

Reflect: When you begin to explore hidden meanings in your life, you may encounter a wall of resistance. This is a good indication that something exists outside your awareness. It is like you are in a boat but something lies in the water, unseen, that blocks your way. It is time to acknowledge and explore what is in your way.

As you think about your personal history ‘from the inside’ with the autobiography, what did you learn about yourself emotionally?

As an exercise, try any of the following sentence completions:

- As a child I learned that I must ...
- I always accepted that I have to ... in relationships.
- If I do something different then the results will be ...
- What I never question about myself is ...

Write out 4-5 different endings. Then look over the list. Do any have an emotional charge? This is likely to reflect hidden learning. Then start to refine the statement until every word feels 100% right.

When you have a sentence that feels right, write it on a card and look at it once a day. Do nothing for a week, maybe two weeks. Do you start to question what you have written? Does an alternate view come up? Do you start to doubt what you initially felt so certain about? You are starting a process of challenging hidden learning in the most natural way possible.

Warning: Nothing I am saying here will make sense to you until you do a sentence completion for yourself. Work with the stem of a sentence that reflects your hidden learning. Only through experiencing this process can you understand it. Skip over anything you want in this book, but not this step.

Note that *resistance* to completing a sentence is *significant* because it will be based on hidden learning as well.

Principle 15: While hidden learning wants to speak you may have mixed feelings about wanting to hear the message. This resistance is normal.

In Neon Lights

The following are examples of using sentence completion to ‘dig’ for the gold of hidden learning.

Mike, a young Christian adult is frustrated that he has not found a wife through the youth group at Church. He is somewhat passive, as it were waiting for God to provide. I helped him write his assumption in the following sentence, “I am waiting for God to change his mind.” His schemas seemed to be in the area of Emotional Deprivation and Failure, but the sentence completion probed for a ‘working assumption’ about how God might respond to his prayers.

Matilda, a very successful young medical doctor, had been frustrated in a romantic relationship. She felt that she was unable to commit though she felt she loved him. Eventually they separated. She used the sentence, “I need my space because...” This was completed “I would feel valued but restricted.” This gave some focus beyond her presenting Entitlement-Grandiosity.

Simon is a 49 year old man who had been robbed at gun-point and had many trauma symptoms. He also found his life terribly restricted by his constant surveillance of the environment for any possible threat. He had a long standing Vulnerability to Harm schema, aggravated by the traumatic experience. The sentence completion, “If I did not keep watch ... I would no longer be safe. I was not safe in childhood with violence between my parents. I have to do everything possible; it is my responsibility.”

Henry was nearly 60 when he was charged with the sexual assault of one of his nephews. He was a Buddhist and his meditation group supported him through the trial and pending incarceration. His schemas were Emotional Inhibition, Unrelenting Standards and Subjugation. Henry had been sexually abused himself as a young child and he gave a number of sentence completions to “I have needed this addiction (to sexual acting out) because ... 1. Cope with pain. 2. Express rebellion. 3. Suppress my emotions. 4. To escape. We thought that rebellion felt most emotionally charged. This became the sentence: “I need to rebel because a trusted authority figure changed who I was. I want control of that back!”

Other examples. A young man with chronic depression struggled with “I cannot allow myself to be happy because ...” A woman seriously abusing alcohol, “I need to sabotage myself because ...” A very unassertive woman, “It is unsafe for me to express any personal needs because ...” A frustrated academic with schemas of Failure, Unrelenting Standards and Emotional Inhibition, “I avoid completing big tasks because ... I cannot achieve perfection.” A middle aged woman who had entered a series of disastrous relationships came to realize her programming was “For me not to feel alone ... I have to fix the distress of others.”

Once you get a sentence that expresses hidden learning it is important to work with it. This refining process allows you to ‘get a hold on it’ in the most effective way. Consider the miss-

match of what you discover. Exaggerate the differences, use vivid language, and say it emotionally. Put the sentence in neon lights!

To Do: Once you identify a difficulty in your relationship can you and your partner or spouse each try the following? Structure the sentence in the following way:

If we didn't have this problem, *then...* *so* I am staying in my attitude (or behaviour, or responses to you) *even though* we are both miserable. Try to fill in the phrases. This will vividly express why you need to be stuck.

If your partner or spouse is willing to do this exercise with you, then you both can write out why you feel stuck. Do not try to solve it yet, but live with your statements of hidden learning for a week or so and then try to talk with 'all the cards on the table'.

Return to your list of schemas. In each choose a relevant sentence completion. For example, if you have Abandonment schema, a sentence completion might be, "I need to be connected to ... (name of person important to you), because ..." "The consequences of losing him or her would be ..." "I cannot survive on my own because ... will happen."

In this way you will interact with your domains of hidden learning, many of the sentence completions will suggest streets but in many cases something will 'light up' with emotional energy. This is the clue to specific hidden learning. Once you have a surprising sentence, that initially feels 100% true for your, then you have arrived at the house!

Principle 16: The content of hidden learning is never general (that is likely to be a schema), but very specific, and making emotional not rational sense.

A vivid example follows:

Extended Case Example of Sally

The following case is used with permission.

Sally is a senior military officer. She is highly respected in her field and had responsibility for hundreds of soldiers in a training camp. She thought that her life was "travelling well. I had what I thought was a loving husband, two teenage children and some very close friends. I also had a range of people I knew through a family movie club I attended with my children."

In the next few months her life deteriorated. Her husband announced he was leaving her. He had been in an affair, which shocked her, and he went to live with his new partner. Sally survived all this but about six months later her three closest friends, for a variety of reasons, ended their friendship with her. One started to gossip about her at church, another moved to another city to pursue graduate studies and the last became over-involved in romantic relationship. The new relationship took precedence and the girlfriend objected to his friendship with Sally.

All this devastated Sally. She became acutely suicidal and had to be admitted to a psychiatric facility. She was seeing a counsellor who did some good work on Sally's grief, but became worried about the suicidal crisis. I saw Sally at that point and worked closely with her family doctor and a psychiatrist who prescribed anti-depressant medication.

Over the next year I saw Sally more or less weekly. Some of my graduate students were also involved in counselling support. She made great progress. She was able to return to her

military duties through a variety of psychological interventions including exposure therapy. She seemed like she was almost fully recovered and we were thinking about completing therapy. But then I thought about how intensely suicidal she had been. It was as if she held her life 'lightly'. Almost with no value. I worried that a similar crisis might occur in the future and then she would be highly at risk of suicide. It had been a 'close thing'.

So I used sentence completion about why she felt she had to kill herself. I had the sentence completion "I need to kill myself because ...". The result was very surprising:

"I am of value only to the degree I am helpful to others. If I need others, I become a burden. My overall worth is the balance, if it is negative then I should kill myself to restore the balance to zero."

I wrote this on a card and she said that every word resonated as true for her. She was asked to read the card once a day for the next week. A week later she reported a huge shift. She said that the first sentence "I am of value only to the degree I am helpful to others" felt about 40% true but the rest "not at all true" and was rated 0% true. She saw that previously her sense of self-worth was extrinsic and was shifting to be intrinsic, and she felt "freer". She revised her hidden learning to the following statement, "I am a valuable person because I have my own values which I can satisfy without needing affirmation from others. I can make a valuable contribution without needing it recognized."

I had Sally visualize saying this to a crowd that included her ex-husband, children, parents and siblings. She had made some new supportive relationships and they were included as well. I asked if anyone was missing and she said, "I want to see me there too." She added, "I need to hear myself say it." I could see a profound shift and I was finally satisfied that the risk of suicide was in the past. Her recovery from risk of suicide was complete. Indeed, I have seen her in follow-up sessions since this turbulent period and while she has faced challenges, she is emotionally stable.

Once you have specific Hidden Learning

Once you have a sentence which expresses your specific hidden learning, look again at every word. Is it right? Is there a better way to express it? Refine it until it is 100% right for you. It is important to do this ASAP because once you express hidden learning you will begin to challenge it. So first while you still believe it make sure you get it right. Rate on a scale 1-100% how much you believe it.

It is best to write it on a card and simply look at it every day for a week or two. Notice the way in which you begin to question the truth of it. This is a natural process which can only begin when you have articulated hidden learning. Initially just notice. Do not try to dispute it.

If the sentence seems bland to you. Express it in an exaggerated way. Matt had an Abandonment schema and relied on his partner Beatrice. He expressed it: "I really need Beatrice, she is the only person who can make me happy." He exaggerated this to "Beatrice keeps me alive. Without her I would be emotionally dead. She is my only hope." This stretched his original statement, to exaggerate it but not beyond it being believable. He found it easier to work with and to allow the natural process of challenging it.

This counter-point of believing hidden learning and then beginning to question the long held truth is part of the change process. This two sidedness, or what Ecker calls juxtaposition, is

an essential aspect of the change process. There has been some research in neuroscience about ‘memory reconsolidation’ which will be considered in later chapters. You can increase the sense of miss-match by recalling or visualizing incidents that go against hidden learning. That will contradict the 100% truth feel of early hidden learning.

Val had a deep sense of unworthiness. She thought that she formed this through experiences of repeated sexual abuse as a child by her uncle. She had a Mistrust Abuse MA schema and her specific hidden learning was: “I was treated as worthless by my uncle, he was a powerful figure, he must be right, so I am worthless.” She exaggerated this to “I was abused so I can have absolutely no value to anyone at any time.” This felt emotionally right for Val. However, she had a lifetime of contradictory experiences. She was a good student, completed a law degree, and was now a partner in a leading national firm. She then thought about how much she billed an hour, which was a lot. She said to herself, “I have a dollar value on my time.” She saw herself in court before a Supreme Court judge and saw everyone listening to her arguments on a case, “I know I am not completely worthless.” Also she saw the loving acts of her husband to her and felt how much he cared for her. She thought about her children and their love. There was abundant evidence for the opposite of her hidden learning.

Note this process of juxtaposition that Val went through. There were two ‘truths’ essentially contradictory, which opened a window to reconsider hidden learning. This is memory reconsolidation. It provides the basis for change.

Principle 17: Finding juxtaposition, in two different sides of a truth, is an important aspect of change.

Therapy Note: Schema therapy has juxtaposition in its distinctive techniques including chair-work and re-parenting. I think it is also present in most experiential therapies.

Ecker has written that the ultimate stage of emotionally separating from your family-of-origin is to hold to a different reality when in their presence. Can you articulate a different truth from what they held about you? Can you imagine yourself seeing them at a future family gathering and asserting that truth? Brian was able to say to his father and step-mother, “I have felt put down by your comments over the years, and I came to believe it. But now I know I have value and that is recognized by others whose opinion I value.” Rehearse this in your mind and then see if you can say it. If you have a highly disconfirming family it would be best to prepare for the family event with a therapist. The challenge here is to find a way to have greater freedom for an intimate relationship.

For Couples

There are many conflicts in relationships that lead to being stuck. What John Gottman (Gottman & Silver, 1999) called being ‘gridlocked’. Often this is due to two or more people with incompatible hidden learning which cannot be resolved because the learning lies outside their awareness.

This book opens a door to the potential of a deep resolution of conflict and finding ways of meeting mutual needs. The first step is to be open to each other’s emotional truths, then to see how it makes sense in terms of both histories and finally to have an honest discussion distinguishing needs from wants (DiFrancesco, Roediger & Stevens, 2015).

Zandra and Matt were locked into conflict about the frequency of sexual interaction. He was reluctant to engage in sexual activity because it was an area of wounding from sexual abuse he suffered from a school teacher. He had hidden learning around being exploited for sex. He could not understand it being a gift or as a way of intimacy. Zandra had grown up in an emotionally restrictive home and for her affectionate touch began with early experiences of dating. She highly valued it, but it was bound up in sexual activity. Matt and Zandra became more aware of their respective hidden learning: Matt “Sex is someone taking advantage of me, making me worthless and if I am to have any value I must resist this.” Zandra, “I need touch if I am to feel alive, any touch including sex even if I do not feel like it.” When this became clearer, their needs came into focus, and they were able to find mutually satisfying non-sexual touch. After claiming this for their relationship, about six months later they decided that they wanted the intense bonding of sex and made an appointment with a sex therapist to help them get there in a way that respected their respective histories.

Initially it is important for couples to tolerate ‘not knowing’ the answer to their spouse’s difficulties. This is realistic because if we do not know their hidden learning – discovery takes time and must be done by the person (since it is their unconscious that has to speak). It is a very different approach than the more usual criticism, “The problem with you is ...” It is more in keeping with hidden learning to speak with “I-messages” not “You-messages”.

Conclusion

Now we have arrived at your house of hidden learning, what do we do with this? The next step is to realize that our minds have the capacity to re-learn through a mechanism found in neuro-science research. This opens the way to understanding a powerful way of change through memory reconsolidation.

To Read Further

I have drawn on insights from coherence therapy (Ecker, et al., 1996, 2012). This includes using sentence completion for the discovery of hidden learning. See Ticic and colleagues (2015) *What’s really going on here?*

Chapter 13. The Pro-symptom and Anti-symptom Paradox

Hidden learning hides. But like a child playing ‘hide and seek’, hidden learning wants to be found. In this chapter I will look at how it ‘stands behind’ a psychological symptom or relationship distress. A symptom may be something like panic attacks or an addiction; relationship distress may be unresolved conflict. These are important clues to hidden learning with its two sides, one in awareness and the other largely unconscious.

A Way In

Something is upsetting you. You will fight against the problem. Naturally. And you know why it is a problem. This reaction is what Ecker has called the *anti-symptom position*. What is more difficult to see is the non-conscious *pro-symptom position* that maintains the symptom. Ecker calls it a process of discovery to move from anti-symptom to pro-symptom understanding.

The Anti and Pro will naturally clash. The following exercise will highlight this.

Exercise: You might try the following cognitive exercise that leads to the juxtaposition of a belief with its opposite ‘side’.

Think about a situation that annoys you. You may have a belief that you were treated badly in a work or social situation. Rate that belief on how strongly you believe it to be true. Then write the negation or opposite of the belief. Then list all the reasons or proof that supports the negation. Then rate how you feel and what actions might be appropriate. Finally rate how strongly you believe the truth of the original belief (out of 100%).

Gary was annoyed at a decision his supervisor made. He felt that he had been neglected in the process and his boss should have consulted with him. He expressed the belief, “My boss should have talked to me and made a better decision.” He rated this at 90%. He then wrote the negation of this as “My boss did not have to consult with me and made a wise decision.” He then listed the reasons why the counter assertion might be true: (a) It is his responsibility to make such decisions. (b) He might have consulted widely but not included me. (c) He may know some things about which I have not been informed and see it from a different perspective. (d) Etc. Gary found himself feeling differently about the situation. He now rated his original belief to be 30% ‘and dropping’ (adapted from Berstein, 2010).

Reflect: This two sided cognitive exercise can help you to appreciate that any difficulty has two sides, the one you ‘know all about’ and the other ‘out of sight’.

Two Sides to One Issue

This gives a very different picture of common problems:

Nancy was frustrated that she could not form a romantic relationship. She felt lonely. Unloved. Then she would react with comfort eating. What drove this self-destructive cycle?

Now we ‘fast forward’ six months and Nancy has been diagnosed with an eating disorder by her physician. She is puzzled about why she cannot control her eating.

She notices feeling upset prior to over-eating. She hates her behaviour, “I feel out of control and then I am filled with regret – even self-loathing if I stuff myself.”

The challenge of pro-symptom understanding for Nancy is to appreciate why she *needs* to over-eat. Nancy saw a therapist who explored her fears of intimacy. She was raised by a single mother who came to depend on her too much. Naturally Nancy was anxious about repeating this. She discovered that she was over eating to gain weight so she would be less attractive to men. This was a solution to what she feared most. Only when she came to understand this could she make some choices about which problem she wanted to solve.

Principle 18: There are two sides to any symptom or distress – one that wants change and one that supports the problem.

This pro and anti-symptom dynamic also plays out in relationships. Bruce Ecker gave the example of a couple who came to therapy with their “communication problem”. The wife complained that her husband viewed everything she said to him as a criticism and he would then counter-attack and behave as if they were enemies. This was ‘a way of coping’ that he learned in childhood (when perhaps it was the best solution available). The therapist saw the husband reacting strongly to even moderate comments by his wife and indeed did treat her as an adversary. The therapist coached them in more restrained sharing of different views and then she asked the couple how they felt, the wife said “relieved” and the husband said “defenceless”. He was quiet for a while and then said, “All I can tell you is, now, I fell unjustified in sticking up for myself.” They came to understand that he had hidden learning that he was “bad and selfish” if he expressed his own needs, but it was the right thing to do only if he was *under attack*, so he needed to see his wife attacking him. In this example you can see how the ‘aggressive style’ of the husband was emotionally necessary if he was to ever express his needs in a relationship. He simply had no other option.

Reflect: In what areas in your life do you sharply react without apparent justification? Perhaps at that point you feel completely justified. This will be because you are ‘acting out’.

Three Clues to Hidden learning

Ecker observed that this example shows three elements of what he called “emotional learning”:

- (a) *Emotional wounds*. The husband had an emotional wound from childhood (this might be in schema domains). His autonomy was impaired because he could not easily express his needs.
- (b) *Pre-supposition* from his autonomy was legitimate, in his case only with an adversary.
- (c) *Protective action* which consists of constructing an attack in order to justify his autonomy.

These can now be explored more for their general importance:

- (a) *Emotional wounds* carry emotional meanings. This has been discussed in previous chapters with schema formation and trauma learning. There is a link between early deprivation or trauma and hidden learning.
- (b) *Pre-suppositions* which are those non-conscious, unquestioned assumptions about 'how things are'. For example, an infant whose parents were career criminals has absorbed antisocial attitudes. The child has seen 'crime pay', it was what put food on the table, but it is also what takes mum or dad away when put in prison. All this is learnt young. The child *knows* this from early experience.
- (c) *Protective action* is any rationale or behaviour to avoid a reoccurrence of the pain. This can include, of course, any re-experiencing of emotions associated with the original injury. A protective action includes the whole range of behaviours leading to difficulties in a relationship including withdrawal, obsessing, anger, blaming, shame, and low self-esteem. It can include behaviours such as using substances, binge eating, work-a-holism, manic activity, even violence. This serves to avoid feeling the pain or ever again being vulnerable.

If we can understand a problem at this level it will help us to better understand the pro-symptom position - what maintains either the relationship problem or a symptom. The pro-symptom position determines what happens. It is in control. So the goal is to discover why having a symptom or a relationship problem is absolutely necessary.

Reflect: Think about the three clues to pro-symptom: wounds, pre-supposition and protective behaviour. How can you use such clues? The following is a common example of conflict being used in a relationship for emotional distance:

Amanda and Matt came for couple therapy. They were able to see how conflict kept them from feeling close. The therapist wanted them to discover why it was necessary to have fights. Why was unresolved conflict the best solution to a deeper problem? So the therapist led them to see, in their imagination, how they might feel after an absence of conflict. Matt replied, "I would feel powerless, like I had lost myself and I am being controlled." Amanda thought, "I would not be able to say no to Matt's sexual advances. I would have no excuse to say no." So for different reasons they had been seeking conflict - the more intense the better. Finally, the pro-symptom position made sense!

Understanding this can lead to better understanding of the relationship process. The anti-symptom *pain* and the pro-symptom *gain* of having the problem. Having the conflict was worth the benefits. No wonder Amanda and Matt were stuck.

Principle 19: The two sides can be described as anti-symptom *pain* and the pro-symptom *gain*.

Understanding the pro-symptom position provides a possible way forward. This allows more realistic problem solving because underlying needs are in focus. And can finally be met.

To Do: Can you take a relationship difficulty and through an analysis of both anti-symptom and pro-symptom discovery, arrive at a deeper understanding of its necessity

for your relationship? Then write this down and share it with your partner? Ideally he or she will do the same. Use your sentence to say something directly, “The reason I need to have this ... (problem) in our relationship is ...” How does this feel. Notice how it is *I* focused. You might be tempted to offer your ‘diagnosis’ of your relationship problem in terms of “The reason you have to contribute this problem to our relationship is...” But this other focus will only contribute to feeling stuck. And be rejected by your partner.

Introducing Memory Reconsolidation

In recent years there has been an amazing advance in neuroscience research. It is called memory reconsolidation. This has been applied to therapy in Bruce Ecker’s last book (2013). This will be more fully discussed in the next chapter.

There seems to be solid evidence that a deeply held emotional truth can be unlocked and re-written by using juxtaposition experiences.

Barry was severely bullied by his older brother. Both parents worked long hours to support the family, which left him vulnerable. He eventually realized that he felt completely cut off from his emotions “as a form of protection. What I can’t feel won’t hurt me.” However this resulted in an overwhelming sense of emotional “deadness”. The strategy he developed to feel anything at all was to cut himself. Self-injury helped him feel alive, “Anytime I want.” This was captured in his hidden learning, “I am dead emotionally. The only way I can feel is to have physical pain that is more intense than my numbness. This makes me alive any time I want.” When he wrote this down on a card, he realized that it was poor solution to an early problem. He said, “It make sense not to feel, when everything was overwhelming, and I was helpless from my brother. But now I am an adult and I have other options.”

Note that the old learning was specific, as a child to a given situation, and has later been generalized to all situations. At the point of generalization this early learning can break down. It is clearly not universal, as your experience of the adult in other areas will usually contradict it. It is also the case that the original autobiographical memory does not change through memory reconsolidation, just the emotional meaning of the original learning.

Conclusion

When you have a problem it is ‘on stage’ for you. You can see it clearly and know why you want it to go away. But psychological realities are never that simple. This chapter has introduced the two sides of anti-symptom and pro-symptom. We have to go ‘back stage’ to see the pro-symptom justification. When both are on stage together a new script can be written. I have also introduced the idea of memory reconsolidation which will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 14: Memory Reconsolidation and Transformational Change

Hidden learning does not easily change. This is important because unlike physical injuries, emotional injuries do not automatically heal with time. As Bruce Ecker has noted they are “peculiarly timeless”.

In this way finally seeing our hidden learning can be like ‘walking through a museum’. There are ‘exhibits’ that do not change. This is uniquely challenging: what we do not see clearly, controls our lives from an early age and leaves us to struggle with what is hard, if not in the opinion of some, impossible to change!

But, and it is a big BUT... There has been an important discovery in neurosciences that the brain has a way to change early learning. This is the promise of memory reconsolidation.

Can we Unlearn Hidden learning?

I have been a therapist for over 25 years. I have sat for countless hours in my consulting room with patients who have struggled with accepted ‘truths’ about themselves, beliefs that have governed their lives, limited their choices and flooded their relationships with ugly emotions. We have agonized together in the slowness of the change process.

One of the most important questions in therapy is how can the brain *unlearn* something? Think of someone you know with early abuse or neglect. Or trauma. Or low self-esteem. Or dysfunctional relational patterns. This is often the focus of therapeutic efforts and it is frustrating how much the brain resists any change, even of early learning which is inherently irrational and completely dysfunctional. And it can last a lifetime driving dysfunctional patterns of behaviour.

Principle 20: Hidden learning tends to remain unchanged in a life.

Hidden learning is something like a bad tenant. The person pays no rent and keeps trashing your house. You want to evict them but nothing works. Even when you hand them a legal notice it is ignored. You bring in the bailiffs but there is some obscure law they can appeal. Nothing works and the tenant remains.

Martin believed “I am un-loveable.” He had experiences of neglect as a child. With many such experiences this belief about himself became *consolidated*. For many years it was believed that once learnt, such beliefs were indelible, ‘written’ in the brain in such a way that it could not be erased (e.g., van der Kolk, 1994). Or that the process of change was to learn new habits over the old established patterns. This has been called ‘counter-active learning’ (Ticic, et al., 2015). It is an attempt to suppress the old learning and to allow a different behaviour, but the old remains and tries to resist. In this view our brain (specifically the limbic system which is part of the mid-brain) is a kind of psychological prison.

I will call this approach ‘old therapy’, as my children used to say ‘old school’, and unfortunately most current therapies are counter-active. The counter-active techniques include relaxation strategies superimposed on anxiety, new behaviours to overcome a sluggish lack of motivation and thought blocking to oppose negative thinking. It is like trying to evict the unwanted tenant by wearing down their resistance to leaving.

Principle 21: There are basically two approaches to therapy, one counter-active and the other transformational.

But what needs to happen to effect real and lasting change? Change must happen at the level of hidden learning. Basically this has been the focus of this book.

A Scientific Advance

Now some welcome news. There has been some remarkable, if somewhat obscure, research in memory reconsolidation. Memory *consolidation* is when something is learned and later strengthened; memory *reconsolidation* is when something new is learnt in place of what was previously learned.

Principle 22: In memory reconsolidation the new replaces the old.

In the following discussion of theory and research I have cited relevant studies so that you can look at the neuroscientific evidence. It is hard to follow (at least it was for me without a degree or two in the biological sciences).

Theoretical Note: This memory research found that once an emotionally charged memory was formed, certain later circumstances provide an opportunity for change (Pedreira, et al., 2002). The surprising discovery was that the brain is able to wipe-out and change an established belief (Pedreira, et al., 2004). This research was initially done with animals, such as the sand crabs used by Pedreira, but it demonstrated an important neurological mechanism in which an animal can unlearn something and re-learn it (Perez-Cuesta & Maldonado, 2009). The stimulus with the sand crabs was of a predator (Pedreira, et al. 2004) which produced a trauma-like response – which could be unlearned and safety re-learned. A similar mechanism has been found in human memory research (Forcato, et al., 2007). The process of memory formation (consolidation), retrieval and re-consolidation has now been well described and it would appear that a number of different types of reactivation, such as waking reactivation (Walker et al., 2003), can lead to reconsolidation (Alberini & LeDoux, 2013; also Lattal & Wood, 2013). An interesting by product of this line of inquiry is how to match certain drugs to gain a similar effect (discussed in (Alberini & LeDoux, 2013). This could have important implications for the practice of psychiatry. Nader & Einarsson (2010) have provided a useful review.

Principle 23: Memory reconsolidation is adaptable since it allows us to respond more flexibly to changes in circumstances. This may have had some evolutionary benefit.

About Therapy

All this has revolutionary implications for therapy. Bruce Ecker has incorporated principles of memory reconsolidation into his Coherence Therapy, the “reactivation of a well-consolidated, longstanding implicit memory appeared to have rendered the stored emotional learning susceptible to dissolution.” (Ecker, 2012, p. 18; also Ticic, et al., 2015). What came to be appreciated was that a reactivation can de-consolidate a memory into a flexible state, which was temporary and could be followed by a relocking or reconsolidation with new learning. The new ‘over-writes’ the old.

New learning is supported by realization or direct perception. This is one reason why visualization works and has been encouraged throughout this book and more generally in therapies such as schema therapy. I believe that memory reconsolidation, as a mechanism, is

used in a range of experimental therapies such as coherence therapy, EMDR, emotion focused therapy (EFT), schema therapy and possibly psychoanalysis in its various forms. I believe that this is why such transformational therapies ‘work’, though not all practitioners are aware of the neuroscience mechanism of memory reconsolidation.

At the risk of overstating a claim, memory reconsolidation is the ‘holy grail’ of psychotherapy. Of course there will need to be future research to establish or contradict this explanation of effective therapeutic change. But few would deny its considerable potential or applicability to the most intransigent of therapeutic problems.

Principle 24: The change mechanism in transformational therapies may relate to memory reconsolidation.

Now to some practical steps:

Miss-match

Reconsolidation is highly selective and affects only the memory that is being mismatched, whatever that memory might be. This appears to be an inbuilt mechanism to allow flexibility and change in learning. The change mechanism requires both:

- (a) Reactivation, and
- (b) Mismatch (an experience that mismatches the target memory or what hidden learning expects).

This “prediction error” is at odds with what is expected. This is what sets off a different mental process which leads to what is best described as transformational change. It replaces old learning. Completely. There is nothing to remain in competition with the old learning (Ticic, et al., 2015).

Coherence therapy has identified the *juxtaposition* of the old and the new learning as elemental for change. A lot is claimed about the effects of such an experience: New learning deletes old learning, is not subject to relapse, remaining symptom free is effortless, and there is an increased sense of a unified self.

Principle 25: Transformational change is initiated by the juxtaposition of contradictory learnings.

This dramatic change in hidden learning is important for therapy – especially experiential therapies that focus on the repair of formative developmental experiences. Note that the goal through this is *aware knowing*.

Conclusion

I have used techniques derived from schema therapy and coherence therapy throughout this book. Some additional methods have also been proposed. This chapter explored memory reconsolidation as the basis for change in transformational therapies.

To Read Further

Emotional learning and coherence therapy (Ecker, et al., 1996, 2012). Also Ticic and colleagues (2015). *What’s really going on here?* Hidden learning (still called emotional learning) in relationship to schema therapy is discussed in a book by myself and Eckhard Roediger, *Breaking negative relationship patterns*, 2017 with Wiley.

Chapter 15: Positive Hidden learning

The *positive* of hidden learning has been a long time coming. You may have noticed an ‘over-attention’ on dysfunctional symptoms or distress in relationships. Is there something beyond pathology?

Hidden learning can be Positive

While dysfunction is important to acknowledge, it is not the whole story. Most of us have positive hidden learning – it is how we cope and adapt in stressful situations. Perhaps with positive self-images. Think about the following statements:

- I am worthwhile.
- I am loved and valued by my family.
- I have something of value to contribute.
- My life has meaning.
- The people in my life are dependable.

These statements reflect positive hidden learning. Usually this comes from our early years, even days, of life. Just as it is natural to behave on negative learning, it is equally natural to act in healthy ways when hidden learning has been positive.

Reflect: Your first memory. Was it positive or negative? If positive then this might indicate a history of positive interactions with your parents or carers.

Also think about your parents and members of your immediate family. List any positive qualities they have, now go back over the list and tick off any that apply to you as well. Be honest with yourself – this is not a time for false modesty.

To Do: Use sentence completion to make a list 10 strengths you have. Maybe ask your partner or family members for additional suggestions. Don’t stop until you have a long list and perhaps a few surprises. Does this reflect areas of positive hidden learning as well?

This will help you to appreciate a positive legacy of adaptive hidden learning.

Schemas can be adaptive

Schemas can be positive. This shifts the balance the somewhat negative focus of *maladaptive* schemas.

Jesse Wright (2006) listed examples of what he considered healthy schemas:

- No matter what happens, I can manage somehow.
- If I work hard at something, I can master it. I’m a survivor.
- Others trust me. I’m a solid person. People respect me. I care about other people. I’m friendly. I am a good spouse (parent, child, friend, lover).

- They can knock me down, but they can't knock me out. I can learn from my mistakes and be a better person. Everything will work out all right.
- I'm intelligent. I can figure things out. If I prepare in advance, I usually do better.
- I like to be challenged. There's not much that can scare me. I can handle stress. The tougher the problem, the tougher I become.

Reflect: Jesse Wright noted that people typically have a mix of different kinds of schemas. Not just negative and maladaptive, but those that are positive and adaptive. Even people with severe symptoms or profound despair have positive attitudes that can help them cope. Can you identify some of your positive beliefs?

Reflect: Wright's statements indicate core beliefs, can you reflect on what kind of positive hidden learning might lie behind such statements? Perhaps identify a hidden learning for each statement.

Now, as we shift focus to schemas, you can begin by simply considering the reverse of maladaptive schemas. This can help you identify what might be called positive schemas. It is also a good way to conceptualize schema strengths.

George Lockwood (Lockwood & Shaw, 2012) presented a very useful table that linked 15 maladaptive schemas with the opposite - which if absent indicates adaptive functioning.

<i>Maladaptive</i>	<i>Adaptive</i>
Abandonment (instability)	Stable Attachment
Mistrust–Abuse	Basic Trust
Emotional Deprivation	Emotional Fulfilment
Defectiveness–Shame	Self-acceptance and Lovability
Social Isolation	Social Belonging
Dependence–Incompetence	Healthy Self-reliance and Competence
Vulnerability to Harm or Illness	Basic Health and Safety
Enmeshment (Undeveloped self)	Healthy Boundaries and Developed Self
Failure	Success
Entitlement–Grandiosity	Empathic Consideration and Respect for Others
Insufficient Self-control	Healthy Self-control and Self-discipline
Subjugation	Assertiveness and Self-expression
Self-sacrifice	Healthy Self-interest and Self-care
Emotional Inhibition	Emotional Openness and Spontaneity
Unrelenting Standards	Realistic Standards and Expectations.

While Lockwood listed only 15 schemas (those with an evidence base), I would add the following to make up the currently accepted 18 schemas:

Maladaptive

Approval Seeking (recognition seeking)

Negativity–Pessimism

Punitiveness

Adaptive

Self-acceptance and Autonomy

Optimism

Realistic Affirmation of Others.

Reflect: Look again at your profile from the YSQ-3 (schema test). Do you see any low scores? They could indicate more positive schemas that are the reverse of the maladaptive schemas identified in the questionnaire.

To do: It is helpful to keep a “positive journal” to record healthy and happy experiences. Can you step back to think about prior hidden learning that was positive? Make a list and later add to it.

Principle 26: Schemas may be positive or negative, conscious or mostly unconscious, but they express hidden learning.

Can we Build Positive Hidden learning?

The short answer is maybe. But it is not easy.

Most positive hidden learning is absorbed. It is a by-product of being in a healthy family and community. Preferably with a number of generations actively participating in each other’s lives. As adults we make choices about our associates. Wise choice in friendships helps. Belonging to a healthy cause such as Amnesty International, struggling for a justice issue, belonging to a community with high ideals. While any friendship network can turn unhealthy, usually there are plenty of good people willing to help one another at some level in a neighbourhood, local social gathering, sometimes in the workplace.

Ned joined a local action group that advocated for a community use of council land. About half an acre was undeveloped but near a large apartment complex. He organized a group to petition local government to put up a fence and allow local people to grow vegetables. Ned formed a committee, which successfully lobbied the council and the project began. He formed a number of close friendships through working with others. Members had a harvest dinner from their produce and celebrated the success of the project.

It is important to be intentional about the voluntary communities to which we belong. In this way we shape our support network and make new opportunities for hidden and spiritual learning.

Reflect: Where do you belong? Are you a member of any social or religious groups? How has this shaped you as an individual? Can you see evidence of positive learning from some of the groups you have belonged to?

Mindfulness

Mindfulness has been adapted from Buddhist and Christian spiritual practice. It is now widely encouraged in 3rd wave therapies such as acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). It is here practiced in a more ‘secular’ way, without any overt reference to spiritual values and there is some debate about whether this has impoverished its effectiveness. However, the

Christian contemplative tradition is rich and it seems appropriate to reclaim this tradition within the current context of mindfulness.

Mindfulness is simply paying attention. A simple exercise to practice is attention to breathing. This helps to focus, maintain attention and to remain centred. Since mindfulness is connected to attention it may be helpful to have greater awareness of both negative and positive spiritual learning. It also has a sense of balance in the detached yet connected attention. This allows some disconnection from ruminating thoughts and this allows the space to explore what has been learnt. The prior before the present. Mindfulness may also help to strengthen positive learning and reinforce healthy behaviour.

To read Further

The view with cognitive behavioural therapy that schemas can be positive (Wright, Basco, & Thase, 2006). For the idea of positive schemas in schema therapy (Lockwood & Shaw, 2012).

Chapter 16: Another Dimension: From Spiritual Learning to Spiritual Knowing

Culture and Spirituality

Culture includes literature, art, music, film, and theatre. The best of our culture is addressing crucial topics once the province of religion. Some would argue that religion functioned in important ways in the past but has become tired and the initiative has been taken up by the creative impetus of culture. Perhaps culture has the potential to be healing.

The Book of Life has outlined ways in which culture can be therapeutic; it “can assist us to get better at managing the normal troubles of everyday life; like the tendency to get unhelpfully irritated with people we like, to lose perspective over minor matters, to lose sympathy with people who deserve our compassion and to take too harsh a view of our own mistakes.” One of the founders of Book of Life Alain de Botton (with John Armstrong, 2016) wrote the book *Art as therapy*. This is an exploration of the healing potential of art.

Reflect: On how understanding history helps us to deal with problems we face today. The visual arts help us see ideas. Music enhances mood. Literature, especially the novel, allows us to inhabit the lives of others. Fashion promotes identity. We can live comfortably in and be inspired by great architecture. And design makes great cities memorable.

I have considerable sympathy with this positive evaluation of culture. I devote much of my leisure time to cultural interests, on holidays I seek out art galleries and great architecture. Attending concerts. Enjoying poetry. Reading the great books of the Western tradition.

When I was a full-time therapist I needed beauty to balance the ugliness I saw daily in my consulting room. The balance kept me sane. Beauty adds to my life; I feel more alive.

A Foundation in Positive Hidden Learning

Spirituality represents the best in each of us. It is not primarily about rigid beliefs or institutional demands, or what most people understand as religion, but making room for a sense of transcendence and values that guide healthy living.

Ricky had a fundamentalist Christian upbringing. He left any religious practice in his late teens when he went to university. He said, “It just didn’t appeal. I wanted to be my own person.” About twenty years later Ricky, as a highly successful executive, discovered meditation, “It allows me to get a sense of depth in my life. I feel centred, not so torn in every direction.”

Reflect: How do you respond to Ricky’s journey? Do you judge his family for their beliefs? Do you think he fell away from a true path? How do you see his changes as an adult? Is he in a better place?

Principle 27: A positive foundation in hidden learning is foundational to a healthy spirituality.

Sonia was adopted into a very loving Jewish family. She followed the path of Reformed Judaism, and it was comfortable for her. She married a man in her faith community. She said, “I have a sense of the presence of God with me. I have moral

guidelines and clear values. It is important for me and something I want to hand on to my children.”

Reflect: Think about your values. List them or Google *values lists* and tick off what you hold as important. Can you link the values you identify with early hidden learning either positive or negative?

To Do: Recall any moments when you felt a sense of the transcendent. Or feel a bond of love to humanity. The Book of Life website <http://www.thebookoflife.org> expressed it in this way, “In such rare moments of higher consciousness, one’s mortality is less of a burden, one’s interests can be put aside, you can fuse with transient things: trees, wind, waves breaking on the shore. From that higher point of view, status doesn’t seem important, possessions don’t seem to matter, grievances lose their urgency; one is serene.”

Can you articulate your spirituality? Is this more an allegiance to an established religion or beliefs? Or perhaps a more general orientation. Or is your highest value humanity?

Exercise: Beliefs, of course, are important. Can you write your own *credo* (your ‘I believe...’). This would be a set of beliefs that you want to affirm as being important for you. Or perhaps, like in the Bible, your own 10 commandments to follow? If you find this difficult, maybe you can think of a person that you most admire, for me someone like Nelson Mandela, and then list the values they lived by.

Uncovering Spiritual Learning

There is a specific domain of hidden learning which I will call *spiritual learning*. This term recalls the central point of hidden learning being what we know but lack words to fully express. So too with spiritual learning: it is what we feel we know about the spiritual realm. This is a combination of what is known but unexpressed and determines our spiritual attitudes and behaviour. Without affirming this unknown quality, spiritual learning as a term is bland. It is simply equated with all the religious teaching we may or may not have absorbed over the years.

Theresa was a devout Roman Catholic who tried to attend daily mass. She accepted the teaching of the church without question but often felt confused when priests disagreed with each other or a theologian challenged official teaching. She believed the teaching of the church but her spiritual learning was that she *must* accept authority without any question or residue of doubt.

Reflect: What schema might Theresa have? Do you think her spiritual learning was positive or negative? Why?

Charles was raised in a politically active family, supporting various labour causes. He was the first person in his family to go to university. There he found a Student Christian Movement group that he felt gave both an example of activism in Christ and were committed to making a political difference. He said, “I have found in prayer and meditation the energy to better devote myself to what is important.”

Reflect: What values do you think Charles learned in his family? Did he maintain these as a young adult? Can you speculate how his hidden learning was foundational to his later spiritual commitments? Did Charles gain new spiritual learning in his time at university?

I think that it is hard to find our way in the spiritual and religious ‘marketplace’. One way of thinking about this is to consider our earliest spiritual learning and then evaluate how much of this legacy still feels true. Gradually the adult quest becomes one of finding what is true. You might be comfortable with ‘what is true for me’, but I consider the real challenge is to be rigorous in our evaluation of truth. This may be along scientific or philosophic principles, with notions of remaining rational, or being open to different dimensions of experience. Ultimately I think there is an emotional dimension: truth has to ‘feel right’.

Revealing Spiritual Learning

There are two dimensions of spiritual learning that are potentially important. First, do we have an understanding of a personal loving God? This would be the goal of a believer in one of the theistic religions of Judaism, Islam and Christianity. What blocks the knowing of God? How might one develop a more intimate relationship with God?

You might consider your image of God: is it just your ‘conscience on steroids’? Do you see only a punitive God who it is not safe to be near? You might try drawing something to represent your image of God. Then ask a friend or family member to respond to what you have portrayed. Can you see if your image of God reflects spiritual learning? Do you consider it healthy and inviting of a deeper relationship with God?

You might also want to think of what blocks your path to a deeper relationship with God. This may include your having feelings of being unworthy. Each of the major religions have ways to address this and you might consult a spiritual leader for assistance. This is also spiritual learning which may be helpful or unhelpful. It is best to try to articulate it and then come to an understanding with possibly a way forward.

To Do: Try a sentence completion. What blocks me from God is ... Try a number of completions and see if any ‘light up’.

If you have a more general view of God, perhaps less personal, then try to identify any blocks to your spiritual path. A sentence completion may help: What blocks my spiritual progress is ... Or: I can live a fuller spiritual life if I ...

The important thing is to understand our own spiritual learning and try to integrate this with what we know about ourselves. Such learning may have been gained at a very young age, never evaluated (‘lazy spiritual learning’?) and now isolated from what we know as adults. There may also be trauma learning in the spiritual realm when say a priest sexually abuses a child. A process of thoughtful integration may be enormously helpful and unblock our path to a deeper spiritual life. This may be understood as a path of hidden to aware spiritual knowing.

Do you find what you believe in to be ‘easy to believe’? Have you taken a Step Back and asked why it might be so? How would you link your experiences as a child with your present beliefs? Perhaps more difficult is the question about whether you would have different beliefs if you had a different childhood?

I hope you might be curious about what I have suggested. If so, you might find some value in the following exercise.

To Do: Picture yourself at a young age, maybe four or five years old. See yourself in what you consider to be a spiritual place: in nature, church, mosque or temple. Then enter into a

written dialogue with your child self. Explore what you as a child *knows* about God and the spiritual dimension. Begin with curiosity and continue until you are surprised (and maybe delighted).

Reflect: Have you had any life changing spiritual experiences such as a conversion experience? Was there any contradictory truths such as ‘sinner’ and ‘grace’? Could this be an experience somewhat like memory reconsolidation but in the spiritual realm?

Surviving or Flourishing?

A final thought. At times our life is a struggle to survive a crisis: dealing with a trauma, a medical crisis, a mental health issue, a relationship failure, the death of a family member, etc. At such moments we do our best to get through. Usually to endure until better times. The role of faith may be to find meaning in the midst of such suffering.

But there are also times when everything goes well. Our life is not ‘tottering on the edge’ of disaster. What is the challenge then? I think it is to find a way to flourish – to live the ‘good life’. This has been talked about by philosophers, and arguably the various world faiths are guides to living well (Volf, 2015).

This book has outlined two paths to human flourishing. The first, which has taken almost all the book, is to outline a process of moving from inarticulate hidden learning to aware knowing. This is the path of discovery and insight. The second path is equally one of discovery. The goal is to find what is true. In the broadest sense this is a spiritual path which might be described as a shift from hidden spiritual learning to aware spiritual knowing.

I hope that you, reading this book and doing the exercises, will have made some steps towards such flourishing. Hopefully to live a ‘good life’ – blessing many.

To Read Further

The website <http://www.thebookoflife.org> has a particular view on religion as supporting the higher parts of the mind as more powerful. They reject dogma as unhelpful. They see an important role for culture as taking up the agenda previously held by religion. Alain de Botton & John Armstrong (2016). *Art as therapy*. The idea of world religions providing templates of human flourishing (Volf, 2015).

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Appendix A: Worksheet

Hidden learning Worksheet

Describe a problem behaviour that you identify in yourself.

You might try doing the following:

1. Step-back

Think what might be the unconscious hidden learning that would lead to what you are doing. What unconscious message would you be obeying to explain the behaviour. Write some possible messages. Honour the emotional logic that would lead to the behaviour even if it seems irrational to you. Do not judge just accept that hidden learning will only make emotional sense.

2. Vantage Point

Imagine that you woke up tomorrow morning and the problem disappeared. What would you feel? What would you think? Can you recognize any way in which the problem is preferable to something else?

3. Sentence Completion

Hidden learning wants to be heard. So a very important technique is sentence completion. I need to have this behaviour because...

Now write down 5-6 possible sentence completions: I need to do -----,

- (a) Because...
- (b) Because...
- (c) Because...
- (d) Because...
- (e) Because...

Now look over your answers, do any seem charged with emotional meaning? Circle that answer. Now work on finding the right words to express what seems right for you. Now rate how much you believe it in % terms.

Other Books by Bruce

Mirror, Mirror When self-love undermines your relationship Revised, PsychOZ Publications, Melbourne, 2001. This is a popular psychology book on how narcissism influences couple relationships. No longer in print but can be downloaded from www.amazon.com

Crossfire! Psychologists coping with cross-examination Australian Academic Press, 2008. A helpful book for practitioners facing court.

Another more recent practitioner book for Australian psychologists is

Fit to practice with Kaye Frankcom and Phil Watts, Brisbane: Australian Academic Press, 2016. Both are available through the publisher, see at Australian Academic Press website: <https://www.australianacademicpress.com.au>

Schema therapy for couples: A practitioners guide to healing relationships, with authors Dr Chiara DiFrancesco (USA) and Dr Eckhard Roediger (Germany), Walden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015. This is the first schema therapy book for schema therapists treating couples. See website: <http://www.wiley.com/wiley-blackwell> or Amazon.com

Breaking negative relationship patterns, with Dr Eckhard Roediger, Walden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017. This is an easy to read resource for couples and uses schema therapy. See website: <http://www.wiley.com/wiley-blackwell> or Amazon.com

Upcoming Release in 2018

A practice manual in schema therapy with Eckhard Roediger and Rob Brockman. To be published by New Harbinger Press.

Please Note: I am happy for a PDF of this book *Hidden Learning: The way we are wired for intimacy* to be given away by therapists to patients or to anyone for general interest. I may develop a workbook in the future to accompany this book. bstevens@csu.edu.au