

# A History of Imago

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## Introductory Comments

- \* Imago Relationship Therapy
  - \* Co-created by Harville Hendrix, PhD and Helen LaKelly Hunt, PhD
  - \* Developed the concept of a “conscious partnership”

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## What is Imago?

- Imago Relationship Therapy is a theoretical model for working with couples derived from years of couples therapy experience, and a synthesis of psychological theories, spiritual traditions, and contemporary physical and human sciences.

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## What lead to the Development of Imago?

- \* A shift from the Individual Paradigm to the Relational Paradigm

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## Individual Paradigm

- \* Descartes: isolated mind
- \* Newton: isolated objects
- \* Darwin: survival of the fittest
- \* Enlightenment: there are universals that can be known by reason
- \* Scientific Method: truth of nature can be known objectively by an observing rational mind
- \* Democracy: freedom, autonomy, independence of the individual



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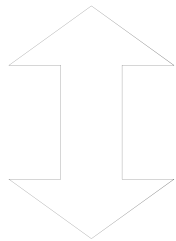
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## Vertical Organization of Experience

- \* Individual is foundational
- \* Everything happens inside the individual
- \* Problem is inside the individual
- \* Solution happens inside the individual



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## Relational Paradigm



- \* Freud's Relational Intuitions
- \* Quantum Cosmology
- \* Spiritual Traditions
- \* Post-Darwinian Anthropology
- \* Relational Psychology
- \* Developmental Social Psychology
- \* Contemporary Interpersonal Neurobiology

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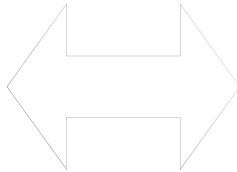
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## Horizontal Organization of Experience

- \* Relationship is foundational
- \* Everything happens between persons
- \* Problem is between persons
- \* Solution happens between persons



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## Primary Sources of Influence for Imago

- \* Freud's relational intuitions
- \* Object relation's focus on the object
- \* Erikson's developmental stages
- \* Attachment Theory's focus on subject
- \* Harry Stack Sullivan's focus on the interpersonal
- \* Martin Buber's focus on the "between"
- \* Relational Psychoanalysis focus on "participation"
- \* Quantum Physics focus on universal connection
- \* Spiritual traditions that focus on the "oneness" of the universe

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## Components of Imago

- \* A Cosmology: Metatheory
- \* An Epistemology: A way of knowing
- \* An Anthropology: Nature of being human
- \* A Relational Psychology: A theory of couplehood
- \* A Diagnosis: A theory of the human problem
- \* A Therapy: A theory of the solution to the human problem
- \* An Integrated Therapeutic Process
- \* A New Way of Loving and Living
- \* A Community with a Vision




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## The Big Idea:



- \* Our unconscious mind actually chooses our committed partner
- \* Why? In order to finish childhood (the unconscious relationship agenda)
- \* So the goal of Imago therapy is to align our conscious mind with our unconscious relationship agenda

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## The Premise of Imago

- \* We are born whole
- \* We are wounded in childhood
- \* We develop defenses that we carry into our adulthood
- \* We seek to regain our original wholeness
- \* So we are unconsciously attracted to a partner that has all the traits necessary to re-activate childhood wounding
  - \* Imago match
- \* Goal is to "do-over" childhood and heal our old wounds




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## The Problem...



- \* This is an unconscious process
- \* Our conscious mind didn't inform us of this agenda!
- \* So we think that our partner changed, wants us to change, etc
- \* Thus leading to an extremely un-fun relationship space
- \* aka: the Power Struggle

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## Stages of the Relationship Journey:

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## The Journey



Romantic Love

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# What is Romantic Love ?

- \* An Emotional Experience
- \* A Selection Process
- \* A Temporary State
- \* Unconscious
- \* Function: To bring together and bond two incompatible people



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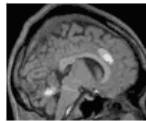
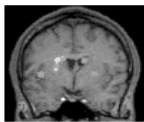
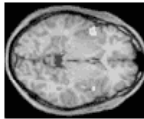
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## This is Your Brain in Love:



Ventral Tegmental Area: primitive reptilian reward system, needs, craving, same way as cocaine

Caudate nucleus: calculating gains and losses, risk-taking

Communicate with each other as part of a circuit

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## The Journey:



Romantic Love

## The Power Struggle



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What is  
**the Power Struggle**

- \* Second stage of relationship
- \* Supposed to happen once bonding is complete
- \* Supposed to end
- \* Growth trying to happen
- \* Once this is recognized, can become a Growth Struggle



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**The Journey:  
Re-commitment**



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**The Journey:  
Doing the Work**



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## The Journey: Awakening



The collage includes: a person fishing, a person in a yoga pose, a person meditating with a glowing head, a person in a hot air balloon, and a person in a hot air balloon.

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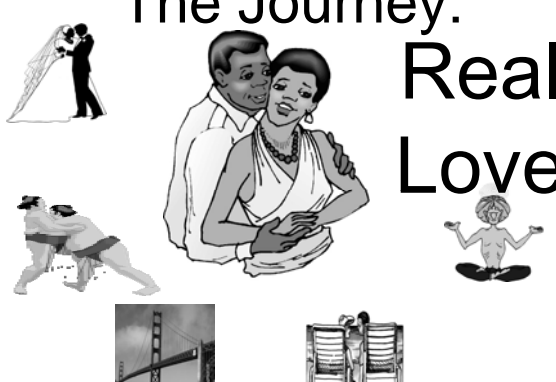
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## The Journey: Real Love



The collage includes: a person fishing, a couple embracing, a person meditating, a person in a hot air balloon, and a person in a hot air balloon.

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## The Tool:

- \* **The Imago Dialogue**
  - \* Basic foundational tool that can be used in many ways with a never-ending amount of topics
  - \* Goal is to use it for both for positive comments and challenging/frustrating issues



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**Specific Phrases for the Imago Dialogue:**

**Mirroring**  
 Let me see if I've got you.  
 I heard you say... or You said....  
 Am I getting you? or Did I get that?  
 Is there more about that?

**Validation**  
 You make sense to me, and what makes sense  
 is....  
 I can understand that ... given that....  
 I can see how you would see it that way  
 because sometimes I do....

**Empathy**  
 I imagine you might be feeling....  
 Is that what you are feeling?

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**Imago Relationship  
Therapy**

- \* Therapist as facilitator, relationship rather than the individuals, is the client
- \* Revolutionizing concepts for relationship therapy -teaching couples how to connect in new ways to facilitate one another's healing and growth
- \* Healing the past in the present heals the past in the past
- \* As brain science developed, the underlying mechanisms of the Imago dialogue were more fully understood
  - \* Can't react and listen at the same time
  - \* Mirroring forces the cortex online which overrides the reptilian brain reactivity

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*Love does not consist in gazing at each other but in looking outward together in the same direction.*

-Antoine de Saint-Exupery

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## A New Way to Love

- \* Equal Partners in Conscious Partnership
- \* Acceptance of the equality of your partner
- \* Shared power with your partner
- \* Mutual responsibility with your partner
- \* Priority of partnership needs over personal needs
  - \* Instead of... "What do I need from this relationship?"
  - \* It becomes... "What does this relationship need from me?"



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## Impact of Imago

- \* Oprah has featured Harville Hendrix and Imago Relationship counseling 17 times, and included Imago in the list of "Unforgettable! Oprah's Top 20 shows"
- \* Worldwide - Imago is in over 20 countries with over 2000 Certified Imago therapists across the globe.
- \* His work provides an effective model for clinicians to use with couples and families
- \* Imago therapy acts as support to other therapeutic intervention (EMDR, ADHD, Addiction Recovery)



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## Could Imago ever hurt?

- \* Harville says that when used correctly, the Imago Dialogue will "always lead to a neutral or positive outcome...always."

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## Criticism of Imago

- \* Unnatural
- \* Consistency is difficult
- \* Availability to all
  - \* Imago community is actively working on this!




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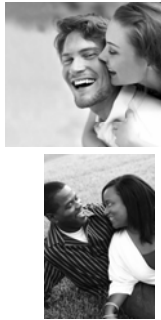
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## Availability to All

- \* Couplehood Programs
- \* Marriage Education Initiative
- \* Agency Partnerships
- \* Scholarships for Couples Workshops




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## Beyond Couples...

- \* Individual work stemming from the Keeping the Love You Find book is very useful with individual clients (whether single or in relationship)
- \* Facilitating groups for individuals using an Imago Group model is also an effective healing and growth tool
- \* Dialogue tools beneficial with Parents and Children
- \* Beyond our field - Imago at work with corporations via Dialogfirst

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## Imago's Big Mission:



- \*Healing the world, one couple at a time
- \* Healthy relationships
- \* Healthy children
- \* Healthy world

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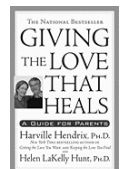
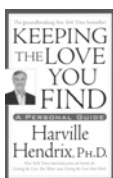
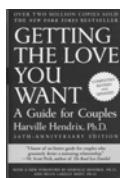
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### The fleet...

- \* 1989 - Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples.
- \* 11 time NY Times best-seller, the book that "changed the face" of couples therapy forever. How, you ask?...stay tuned...
- \* "We cannot experience life in its fullness unless we have an intimate relationship with another human being and, beyond that, a feeling of connection with the world around us."
- \* 1993 - Keeping the Love You Find: A Personal Guide
- \* 1998 - Giving the Love that Heals: A Guide for Parents
- \* 2005 - Receiving Love: Transform Your Relationship by Letting Yourself Be Loved
- \* Upcoming... The Best Little Book on Marriage Ever Written




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- \* Fisher, H. et al. (2005). Romantic Love: An fMRI study of a neural mechanism for mate choice. *The Journal of Comparative Neurology* (493), 58-62.

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