

Enriching Relationships through Enhancing Physical Intimacy **A New Therapeutic Approach Offered at Family Service**

by Robert Mardrossian, Ph.D., Executive Director

During the 20 years that I have worked with couples, I have heard concerns regarding the challenges of maintaining a sexually vibrant relationship. What I have found noteworthy is that these concerns have been expressed by couples married for decades, couples together for a handful of years and yes, even couples who are newlyweds.

Typically, when couples expressed concern about their sexual functioning, I explored if there were any underlying issues in the relationship as well as the nature of the couple's communication. I believed that if couples talked openly with each other and if there were not underlying conflicts, the couple's sexual relationship would be satisfying. While this approach helped many couples, there have been some couples who needed guidance directly related to their sexual functioning. In these instances, I referred the couple to someone trained in this area.

Last year, in response to a number of couples who were seeking specific assistance with their sexual relationship, I participated in an intensive training program that addressed the treatment of sexual difficulties. The training included fifteen classroom hours and 35 hours working directly with a couple. The program was facilitated by internationally recognized psychiatrist and sex therapist, Dr. Domeena Renshaw, at Loyola

University Medical Center's Sexual Dysfunction Clinic. During the past 35 years, the clinic has treated over 3,000 couples and reports a success rate of 80%.

Dr. Renshaw creatively integrates

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Masters and Johnson's behavioral techniques with advances in relational theories and communication exercises. In seven weekly structured sessions, the goal is for couples to not only improve their sexual functioning but also to *promote emotional intimacy*. Rather than "treating" the individual partners, the relationship is the "patient". For some individuals, feeling emotionally close fosters the desire for physical closeness, while for other individuals physical closeness opens the door for emotional sharing. During the seven weekly sessions, both physical and emotional intimacy are encouraged and enhanced with the intent of enriching the couple's relationship.

As suggested above, the focus of the Clinic is not exclusively on a couple's sexual functioning but also addresses underlying conflicts and

communication skills. However, the emphasis of the therapists' interventions clearly centers on enhancing the couple's sexual intimacy and enjoyment. As couples openly discuss their sexual concerns, their communication improves overall and sometimes unresolved hurts are exposed and resolved.

As a clinician training at the Sexual Dysfunction Clinic, it was powerful to witness firsthand how this process occurred. Facilitating the growth and reconnection between a couple who had physically and emotionally withdrawn from each other was a meaningful experience. As some of the sexual issues for which the couple sought help started to improve, the couple felt the beginning of a restored sense of trust and closeness. However they were only able to go so far in addressing their sexual concerns because other issues relating to conflict and a lack of emotional intimacy emerged. Tackling these emotional issues

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BOARD BIZ

by Margaret Benson, Board President

“Oh, What a Night”

With apologies to the Four Seasons, oh, what a night we had on April 14. Those of you who missed this year's benefit will be sorry to read that you missed a rip-roaring time. Not only did the event raise \$30,000 for the agency, our 170 guests also raised the roof of the Winnetka Woman's Club thanks to the antics of those singing and dancing lawyers from the Chicago Bar Association and their satirical musical revue, *King Tort and the Golden Age of Lawyers*.

Ok. Maybe we can't give these attorneys all of the credit for the intensity of the celebration. Our event partner, The Grand Food Center, provided a lavish buffet and open bar. It was hard to say which was more popular—the carving station, or the signature lemon drop martinis. Personally, I credit the martinis, although even the teetotalers in the crowd were also frolicking.

How else can we explain Don Crost's success at auctioning off a tie—

featuring lobsters no less—for \$300! Don also auctioned off a week's stay at a posh 3-bedroom, 4-bath condo in Steamboat Springs, CO, along with 50,000 air miles. The condo was donated by AG and David Krone while Harry Grace and Ingrid Anderson donated the miles. Benefit guests also bought a day in the kitchen with famed chef/restaurateur, Gabriel Viti; Bears, Cubs and White Sox tickets, a two-hour boat ride on Lake Michigan on either a Sea Ray power boat or a 27-foot sailboat; a basket of select wines and dozens of wonderful silent auction items.



Staff member Janet Goss and her husband Scott



Friends Lois Jackim and Margery Shurman share a delightful conversation

Harry Grace, this year's benefit committee chair, deserves a standing ovation for all of the work he did organizing the event and cracking the whip (metaphorically speaking, of course) on his fellow committee

members: Gary Segal, Jennifer Lahti and Karen Nisley Long. We'll be sure to give Harry his kudo's and attabboys, as soon as he returns from that . . . um-m-m-m “vacation”.

Comings and Goings

The Family Service Board extends a huge thank you and bids a very fond farewell to Stuart Biegel and Cynthia Gray, upon their retirement from the board. As we wave adieu to Stuart and Cynthia, we give a hearty welcome to three new board members: Raheela Gill Anwar, Christine Walker and Cheryl Bickford. Raheela and Christine are from Winnetka, while Cheryl helps represent our Northfield contingent. All three have school-aged children, varied professional backgrounds and bring amazing energy along with very welcome skills and interests to Family Service. Thanks to them, fiscal year 2008 should be fabulous.

This Summer Look for Us At . . .

. . . Winnetka's July 4th parade where board members will be marching alongside the festooned Segal Mobile and maybe, just maybe, if we are all very lucky, an equally decked out Grace Mobile. Aren't we lucky to have board members with such adorable cars?

. . . and at Winnetka Days where staff and board members will sit and schmooze and sweat, just waiting to meet and greet our fellow villagers. We'll probably have some treats for anyone who stops by to visit, so be sure to look for us. And while you're at it, stop in to cool off and check out some of the fabulous bargains offered by the Thrift Shop.

Happy New Year

Family Service's fiscal year ends June 30. The Board would be remiss if we didn't congratulate you for a successful 2007. Thanks to you, we are finishing the year in the black and with enough money to confidently begin another year of providing quality mental health services to our community. The agency has been providing services of one kind or another in Winnetka and Northfield for nearly 115 years. We are proud of our history and recognize that it's only because of your support—financial and otherwise—that makes our continued existence possible. Thank you and Happy New Year!

Enriching Relationships *continued*

added building blocks in the foundation that allowed the couple to then continue to pursue physically intimacy. Addressing and improving the problems in one area, provided a springboard to address and improve problems in other areas. This reciprocal process enriched the couple's whole functioning and relationship.

I should point out that while couples are asked to begin to physically connect with each other in the first week of the program, they are asked to do so in a non-sexual way. The initial exercises are done in the privacy of the couple's home and re-introduce or in some instances, introduce the couple to the experience and pleasures of non-sexual touching (i.e., avoid touching one's partner's breasts or genitals). This experience teaches the couple how to be sexual and sensual and shows them the difference between the two. It also helps each person discover the sights, sounds, touches, tastes and smells that s/he finds most sensual, arousing and pleasing.

It is only after a series of increasingly physically intimate exercises, done regularly in the privacy of their homes and discussed with their therapist afterwards, that couples progress to having sexual relations (which occurs in the fourth or fifth week). In this way, the pressure to perform is removed from experiencing the pleasure of sensual contact and this also sets the stage to rediscover and re-construct from the beginning, the couple's sexual relationship.

There are a broad range of problems for which people seek help with their sexual functioning. Some problems clearly are for physiological reasons, others clearly for emotional reasons and many problems have as their

genesis both emotional and physical reasons. The six most common sexual problems seen at the Sexual Dysfunction Center include erection problems (the most widespread sexual problem in the United States, affecting more than 30 million men); a lack of interest in sex ("desire disorder", the second most common problem seen at the Center); an inability to have orgasms; differences in sex drives; premature ejaculation; vaginismus and painful intercourse. These issues do not encompass all

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the situations for which couples seek help but they cover most of them.

Many couples who struggle with their sexual functioning, or for that matter relationship issues in general, are reluctant to seek help. Why bother addressing an uncomfortable topic that can't be helped? Why take the risk of opening Pandora's Box to deal with issues that are problematic but bearable?

One reason is that unattended small problems can become large problems. Too often couples avoid addressing issues until a great deal of resentment and hurt have occurred. Also, sometimes things may not be what they appear. On a number of occasions, couples have sought help for a sexual problem, when in fact the "sexual problem"

was a manifestation of an issue unrelated to the couple's sexual functioning. Perhaps the best reason to seek help however is that *things can get better.*

Yes, it may feel safer to avoid issues but sometimes safety is not all that it's cracked up to be, especially if it is at the expense of freedom. Freedom to share the joys of intimacy with one's partner, freedom to love and be loved, freedom to communicate more openly, freedom to be more accepting of one's body and one's partner's body, freedom to live a rich, full life. As we all know, freedom does not come easily. Although it takes work and has its painful moments, when one considers all of the consequences, the potential gains can outweigh the risks.

Family Service is now offering a seven week guided program for couples who wish to enhance their marital or sexual relationship. Because seven weeks is a brief period, the time is used intensely. Each session involves some couple work, individual work, communication exercises, questionnaires and worksheets. The weekly sessions range from two to three hours. If you have questions about this program, please contact me directly at 847-446-8060 or at rmm@familyservicewn.org. If you prefer to address concerns in your relationship on your own, Dr. Renshaw's book, *Seven Weeks to Better Sex* not only provides a format to enhance your sexual life but can enrich a couple's whole relationship.



*Dr. Robert Mardirossian
Executive Director*

“OH, WHAT A NIGHT!”

Family Service thanks all of our friends who made this year's benefit our most successful ever.

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We have made every effort to ensure our thank you list is accurate. If you notice any errors or omissions, please call Kim Persaud so we can update our records. The donors listed are for contributions made for our Annual Benefit, King Tort and the Golden Age of Lawyers.

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Family Service of Winnetka-Northfield is a private, not-for-profit community service organization that promotes the emotional well-being of individuals and families through quality, affordable counseling and psychotherapy. Additionally, we provide educational programs that enrich community life, serve as a resource to local organizations and respond to societal changes as they affect the lives of those we serve.

Meet Family Service's Newest Therapist

Family Service of Winnetka-Northfield is known for providing excellent clinical and community education services and I am excited to be a new member of this talented staff. It is ironic that at Family Service I join three staff members who were previously at the community agency (Fillmore Center/Pillars) where I worked until recently, but had left by the time I began there. It feels like coming home to a familiar, comfortable place.

As early as high school, I knew I wanted to pursue a career as a psychologist since I was fascinated by other cultures and enjoyed volunteering as a teacher's aide in an elementary school for autistic children. Towards this end, I completed my Bachelors in Clinical Psychology and Spanish at Purdue University and spent my junior year studying at the University of Madrid. This was one of the best things I ever did as I was able to live with a Spanish family, dialogue with other students and become immersed in the Spanish way of life. I later earned my Masters in Clinical Psychology at Farleigh Dickinson University and Doctorate in Psychology at the Illinois School of Professional Psychology/Argosy here in Chicago.

One of the most enticing things about working in the field of mental health is having the opportunity to form a collaborative relationship with clients who are in the process of enhancing self-awareness and being true to themselves, learning to relate more positively with others, as well as, coping better with inevitable changes in life. From working with preschoolers and their parents in Head Start programs in Chicago to adolescents struggling with identity issues and older adults who have transitioned to independent living facilities or nursing homes, I have found that common elements of the human condition emerge. Despite having distinct worldviews, cultural traditions and personal experiences, we all have a need to be loved, valued, understood and connected to others in a meaningful way. Therapy offers individuals a place to open up emotionally, be more accepting of oneself and understand how our behavior impacts others. I look forward to continuing this rewarding work and to network with local schools and agencies in order to provide clinical services needed in the community.

~ Lauren Williams, Psy.D.



THE THRIFT SHOP CLOSET

Mike Topper, Manager

The Winnetka Thrift Shop was delighted to participate in the 31st annual Winnetka Chamber of Commerce recognition luncheon on May 16th. A fashion show featuring SPRING LOOKS was presented by local stores to more than 200 guests at this community tradition.

We were proud to showcase some of our upscale designer fashions modeled by volunteer Evelyn Kalensky. Several questions were asked of our model as to the sizes and costs as she circulated through the audience. Many participants were pleased to realize the quality and variety of our ever changing stock! Family Service's Winnetka Thrift Shop looks forward to welcoming them as new customers.

Evelyn was a hit in a seersucker shift dress by Lilly Pulitzer. The jute purse was by Carole Little and sun hat by Soss Too. The faux crystal necklace added just the right touch. It's ideal for a summer garden party and if the night turns cool, the Fiji Sport sweater is a perfect wrap.



Evelyn was a sight to behold in this beautiful 3 piece Escada pant suit. Her shoes were by Ferragamo and sun hat by Pan Tropic. Her accessories included an Aurora Borealis crystal and pearl necklace and a vintage 14 carat gold Omega watch, all available for purchase at the Winnetka Thrift Shop. This ensemble is sure to be a winner for a gala summer affair.

PLEASE NOTE OUR NEW FALL OPENING DATE

The Winnetka Thrift Shop Invites You
to Join Us for Our Fall Opening

Thursday, August 23, 2007

10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Fall & Winter Clothing	Housewares
Pictures	Jewelry & Furs
Formal Wear	Linens
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