

*Emotional Sobriety:
The Undiscovered Frontier in Healing Relationships*

Rokelle Lerner

Senior Clinical Advisor

Crossroads Centre Antigua

© All rights reserved. Written permission needed before copying

rokelle@rokellelerner.com

crossroadsantigua.com

● *Hedi and Yumi Schliefer*

*Our relationship happens in the space in between us
Everything your partner says in the present is a child trying
to tell their story*

● *Esther Perel*

*Allow people to define the state of their union and what they
long for
Most of us will have two or three relationships in our lifetime;
sometimes this is with the same person.*

● *Janine Fisher*

*Emotional memory converts the past into an expectation of the future.
It makes the worst experiences in our lives persist as felt realities*

● *David Schnarch*

*Many people say they want intimacy but what they're longing for is
acceptance, validation and unconditional love
“A solid, flexible sense of self in relationship lets you stand on your
own two feet without always standing on your partner's toes”*

Emotional Sobriety

- When the best of us does the thinking and talking
- When our emotional well being is determined by our inner guidance and not by others or situations
- When we can tolerate intense emotions without acting out, foreclosing on feelings, or self-medicating

Interdependency:

- If you love someone, then caring for their needs **MUST COEXIST** with taking responsibility in meeting your own needs.

Codependency

- When we allow ourselves to become so distracted by another that it pulls us away from our connection with ourselves. This disconnection is the source of immense pain.
- Control others in order to soothe ourselves.

Expectations and Questions

- “Now that I’m sober, I’ll go to AA and meet someone else who’s sober and we’ll have the perfect life together”
- “Now that I’m not using, how do I handle my flashbacks that get triggered during intimacy?”
- My partner and I have never had sex sober, it’s going to be wonderful. OR, I’m not going to be able to be sexual in recovery.
- “In recovery I’m not attracted to my wife anymore, I’ll probably leave the relationship.”

“I think my sponsor is cute.”



Hallmarks of a Healthy Relationship

- Each person has a greater sense of “zest”, vitality, energy
- Each person has more desire for connection with the other
- Each person has a more accurate picture of her/himself and others
- Each person feels a greater sense of worth
- Each person has greater motivation for fulfilling their purpose in the world

Miller, JB, (2013)

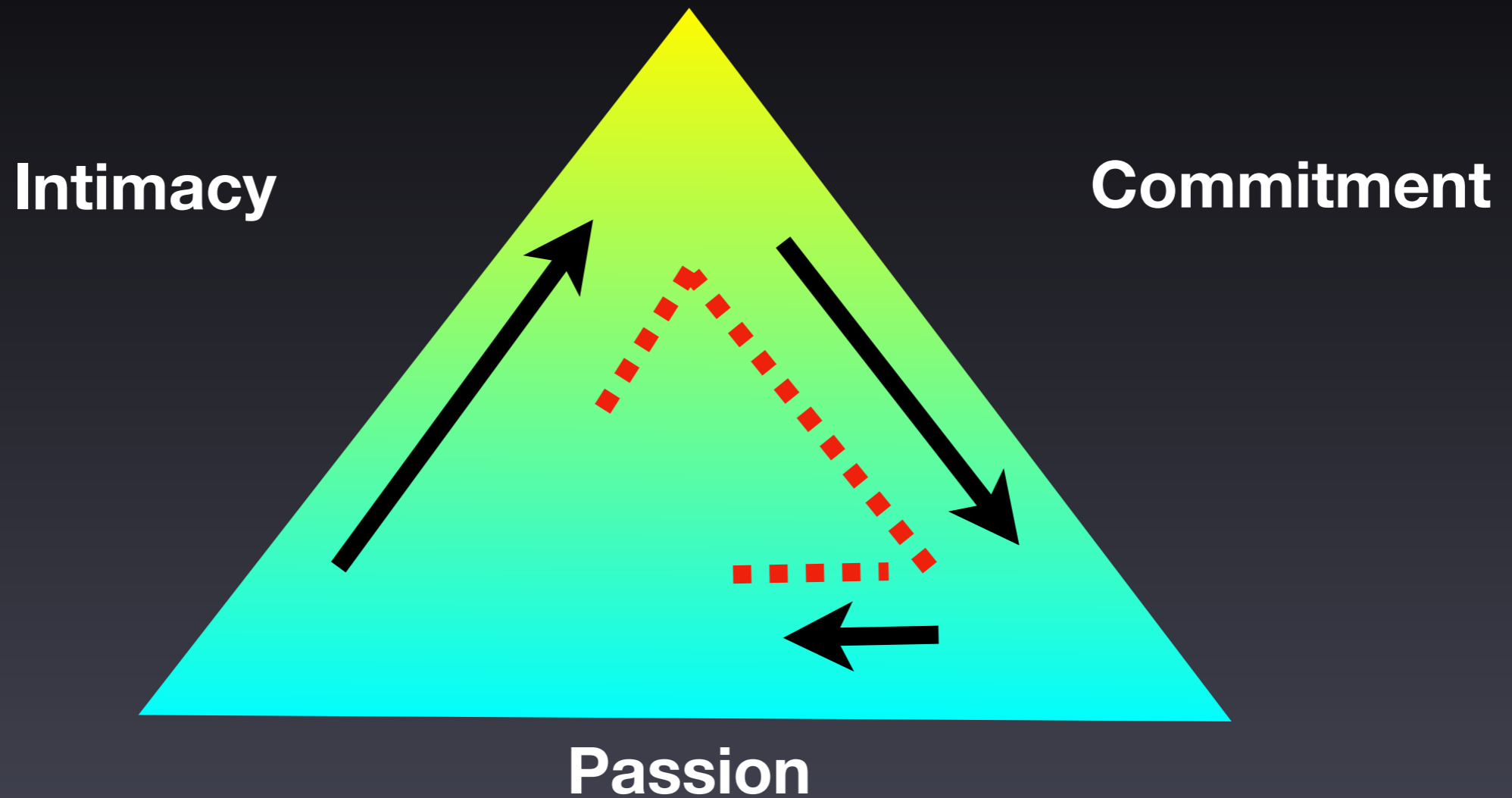
Symptoms of Disempowerment

(non-mutual or abusive relationships)

- Diminished zest or vitality
- Confusion - Lack of clarity
- Diminished self worth
- Diminished creativity
- Turning away from relationships



Sternberg Love Triangle



Sternberg, R 2007

What Does Your Heart Long For?

- ◆ How will she sabotage yourself?
- ◆ What is a specific sign that you're achieving her heart's longing?
- ◆ What support do you need?

Has your client Inherited a Legacy...

- Of Pain?
- Of Anger?
- Of Bitterness?

Debts

Credits

**Alcoholic father who
never got sober**

**History of accomplished,
persistent men**

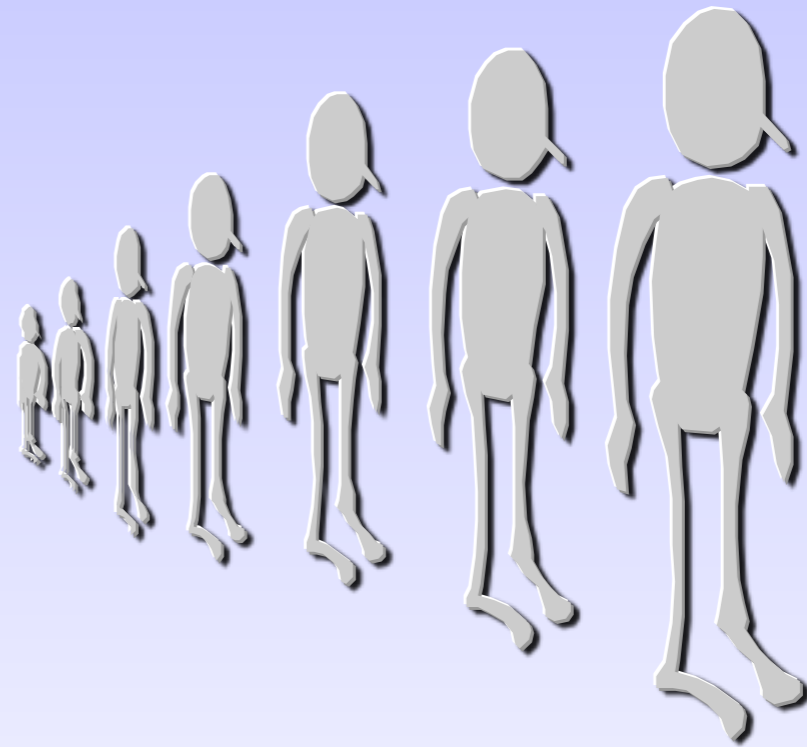
- ◆ Feel disloyal about delving into ACoA work
- ◆ Unable to support his wife in her recovery
- ◆ Feels as if he's betraying someone by getting healthier so he sabotages his growth

Why Do We Remain Loyal?

- Because on some level, it feels disloyal to grow developmentally beyond parents
- We're reluctant to lose the love of a parent who, in some cases, couldn't be there for us in the first place
- Women, particularly, define themselves through a series of relationships and are loath to lose them

Relational Reenactment

- Dependency
- Distortion
- Provocation





Hyper-arousal: Fight, flight, anxiety, panic, rage, mania,
Stuck on “high” Sympathetic



Hypo-arousal: Dissociation, numbness, depression,
oversleeping Stuck on “low” Parasympathetic

Reptilian Brain

- Reptiles don't believe in relationships. They kill their young! Always looking out for danger
- When our clients are in reptilian brain: recognize it but don't trust it, take time to self soothe
- Don't make decisions when you are fearful, angry or anxious!
- Ask themselves: what am I afraid of, how old do I feel?

What Part of the Brain is Firing???

- Limbic Brain: needs connection and pleasure
- Neo-Cortex: makes meaning and connects how things go together
- Amygdala/Reptilian Brain: Flight, fight, freeze, faint, panic, rage

Common Triggers

Being surprised

Having to wait

Messy house

Being alone or being with others

Disappointment

Being ignored or being watched

Watching other families

Perceived criticism

Being asked questions

Feeling unaccepted



Is it Present or is it Past?

- Emotional Boundaries:

“It is my birthright to express a wide range of emotions. I also acknowledge that the emotion I’m experiencing may be more about my personal history than what’s going on in front of me”

- How old do you feel?

(If one feels less than their chronological age they are reliving the past)



Elements of Attachment and Boundaries

- Mirroring
- Constancy
- Boundaries are destroyed in 2 ways:
intrusion
distancing

What Does it Take to Move from Disempowerment to Healthy Relationships?

- Honesty
- Self-confrontation:
 - Can I confront myself?
 - Can I stand up for myself?
 - Can I stand up with myself?

Differentiation is the Ability to Stay in Connection *Without* Being Consumed.

How do we learn this?

**BY GOING THROUGH A
SERIES OF RELATIONSHIP
CRISIS**

Recipe for Healthy Relationships

- Self Validation
- Conflict
- Unilateral self disclosure

Something to Keep in Mind:

- 📌 Our ability to differentiate must keep pace with our partner's increasing importance to us
- 📌 It's not safe to love someone more than one is able to validate, self disclose, tolerate conflict

◆ “If you start practicing this at home and people aren't complaining, you probably aren't accomplishing anything”

Murray Bowen

From Reactivity to Integrity: Emotional Sobriety

- “I am not going to get distracted from who I am. Because when I do, I’m pulled away from my connection to myself and that’s too painful. THEN I HAVE NOTHING TO GIVE.”
- “I’m going to insist on being WHO I AM, regardless of how you behave. And who I am is love, integrity, courage and grace.”