A Brief Introduction to Imago Relationship Therapy
With Sophie Slade, Ph.D., Psychologist,
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Imago Relationship theory helps us to understand ourselves and our clients – why we pick the partners we do and why intimate relationships can be so challenging for so many of us. Imago Relationship Therapy gives clients the skills and understanding they need to turn their conflicts into opportunities for the repair of current and past relationship hurts and for re-integrating denied parts of the self that are projected onto partners. It reframes conflicts as necessary triggers inviting us to do the work of adulthood – growing beyond our childhood relational adaptations and into our fullest potential – and provides the tools to do this effectively. Imago theory and practice was developed by Harville Hendrix, Ph.D. and Helen LaKelly Hunt, Ph.D., from their extensive knowledge of relationship science, deep discussions and their own relationship challenges, and from Dr. Hendrix’ clinical work with couples over many years. www.gettingtheloveyouwant.com

Outline
Morning:
Introductions
Overview of Imago Theory
  - Developmental needs, wounding and adaptations
  - The Imago and Partner selection
  - The “exquisite perfection of the fit” between partners in areas of greatest conflict
  - Conflict as growth trying to happen
  - The relational brain
  - The stages of relationships – from Romantic Love to Conscious Relating
  - The journey of healing and growth
Questions and discussion

Afternoon:
Communicating for connection: The Imago Dialogue
Live demonstrations and/or video clips of using the structured Imago Dialogue process for:
  - Expressing appreciation
  - Working through a frustration
Experiential practice
Questions and discussion

Learning objectives:
Participants will be able to:
  - Discuss the developmental dynamic underlying conflict in intimate relationships
  - Explain the role of the Imago in Romantic Love and the Power Struggle
  - Use the skill of “Mirroring” as a therapeutic tool and teach it to clients
  - Describe the importance of safety for relationship change.

Bibliography:
Harville Hendrix “Getting the Love You Want: a Guide for Couples”
Harville Hendrix “Keeping the Love You Find: a Personal Guide”
Harville Hendrix & Helen LaKelly Hunt “Giving the Love That Heals: a Guide for Parents”
Harville Hendrix & Helen LaKelly Hunt “Receiving Love”
Harville Hendrix & Helen LaKelly Hunt “Making Marriage Simple: 10 Truths for Changing the Relationship You Have into the One You Want”
Sophie Slade, Ph.D. is a licensed psychologist in Quebec, Canada. She has been in private practice working with couples and individuals since 1986. She trained with Dr. Harville Hendrix in 1992 and presents Imago workshops for couples and individuals, and Imago trainings for therapists internationally. In 2014 she received the Harville Hendrix Award for Clinical Excellence. She has been in committed relationship with her husband, David, who presents the workshops with her, for over 40 years. They have been on their Imago journey of healing and growth through relationship since they attended a “Getting the Love You Want” workshop in 1991. Dr. Slade lives in Montreal and London.

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Imago Relationship Theory – A brief overview
One Way of Perceiving Relationships

Childhood
☐ Most of us come into the world with our full potential relatively intact and with genetic predispositions.
☐ During childhood in our relationships we experience pleasure and pain.
☐ Pain results when we do not get some of our basic needs adequately met.
☐ Our primitive survival drive equates pain with the threat of death.
☐ We learn to adapt to get more of the pleasure and less of the pain.
☐ These adaptations help us to survive and they limit our full potential for connected relating.
☐ We get messages about how we can and cannot be and behave to be accepted by our social group.
☐ To get this acceptance we give up some of our capacity to function fully in areas of thinking, feeling, acting, sensing and our very being.
☐ We emerge from childhood with some basic needs insufficiently fulfilled, with our adaptive styles firmly established, with some areas of our functioning repressed or undeveloped, and with an internalized image (the Imago) of the people who have been most important to us in our experiences of love and pain.

Some Premises of Imago Theory
☐ All things in nature have an impulse towards healing and wholeness.
☐ We were wounded in relationship; it is through relationship that we must heal.
☐ The unconscious purpose of adult intimate relationships is to finish childhood so we can reach our fullest potential and regain our natural energetic pulsation.

Adulthood - Unconscious Relating
☐ We are attracted to people who match our Imago, i.e. who have the best and the worst traits of the people who have been most significant to us, and can evoke in us similar primal feelings.
☐ We are attracted to people who function fully and sometimes excessively in the areas where we have shut down our functioning in order to be accepted.
☐ If we get into relationship with them we initially see only the positives. We are blind to the negative traits or find them attractive, endearing or easily changed.
☐ The “Romantic Stage” gives us a taste of the fullest potential of the self, the other and of relationship. Paradoxically we are in relationship with the reality of the partner’s most loved and loving self, and also with the illusion of who they are, based on our own idealized Imago which we project onto them like a movie onto a screen.
☐ The “Romantic Stage” does not last. Researchers believe that our brains habituate to the neuro-chemicals which produce the feelings and side effects of Romantic Love: euphoria, high energy and libido, decreased appetite, etc..
The “Power Struggle” follows when we are both trying to get our unfulfilled needs from childhood met by a person who cannot meet them because of their own survival adaptations, which resemble the worst traits of our caregivers. These trigger in us the rage or fear with which we reacted when our primitive survival drives were threatened in childhood. More and more we project our negative Imago onto the screen of the other.

The survival adaptations of one partner cause pain to the other, who defends him/herself and the defense causes pain to the partner, who defends …, thus establishing a vicious cycle of re-wounding and defense, re-wounding and defense.

In addition, when we see in the other the capacities we repressed in order to be accepted, they trigger anxiety in us and we try to repress them in the partner.

To get out of the pain of the “Power Struggle” many of us end the relationship or turn to other people and activities (e.g. lovers, children, work, addictions) to try to get our unfulfilled needs met.

The conflict of the “Power Struggle” is an indication that growth is trying to happen. This stage is meant to be and is not meant to last.

**Adulthood - Conscious Relating**

- We become conscious of our own unfulfilled needs from childhood and our unconscious relationship agenda.
- We become conscious of our own disowned and denied areas of functioning.
- We become conscious of our own survival adaptations and how these trigger pain in our partners.
- We develop and implement a Personal Growth Plan to re-integrate lost capacities to think, feel, do, sense and be.
- We learn and use skills to relate in ways that are consistent with our intentions rather than our emotional reactions and primitive survival directives. We exercise greater choice.
- We let go of old relationship hurts and old reactive ways of being in relationship.
- We learn to be safe and healing partners.
- We learn to empathically understand and accept others as they are, while inviting them to grow back into their fullest potential.
- We grow back into our full potential to meet our partners' unfulfilled needs.
- We work through our resistance to receiving the love we want.