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Holes in Roles

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My work with individuals, couples and families over four decades leads me to the notion that human infants enter the world genetically supplied with an innate template (model) that prepares them to automatically (instinctively) recognize and appropriately (intuitively) respond to the various, familial, kinship figures they will encounter as they grow up. Further, as well as having an innate tendency to "see and react to" those kinship roles, they also seem to have the innate, rudimentary potentiality to "take on" and "act the part of" each and every one of those kinship roles as situations seem to require in the family settings they grow up in.

In other words, infants arrive with an in-built knowledge of, and preparedness to meet, all the different familial and relational roles such as mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, siblings, mates, and peer figures. Also, they have within themselves - albeit in rudimentary form, regardless of their sexual gender - an innate capacity to act as (take on the functions of) mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, etc. One could call those innate categories of capacities "stem selves" which could be cultivated by external circumstances to reproduce, or "take on" every single kind of role function seemingly called upon by the outside world.

I posit the notion that there is an innate neurological and biological time-line for the ripening of each one of those potential roles. It is optimally useful, evolutionarily speaking, that one becomes a husband or a wife when one reaches the age (and capability) of adult peer responsibility and contractual reciprocal partnership. This implies that one best becomes a parent when one is a sexually and emotionally mature person, fully capable of being a parental care-giver and taking on the serious responsibilities of that role. All children have the innate template and potential temperament to become a husband or a wife, though they may have not yet "ripened" sufficiently to take on those adult tasks and roles. They know that their parents were once children and that their parents should have had their parents taking sufficient care of them.

Children do not mature well or even become fully human when born in isolation from other humans, e.g., feral children. We are a social species and come to maturity in optimal condition when we are reared in need-satisfying interaction with large numbers of well-functioning relatives and other effective community figures. Since the present is driven by memories of the past, we are preter-naturally curious to discover the history of what has happened in our family line before we were born in order to optimally deal with the immediate present and successfully anticipate a satisfying future. Thus, it seems clear that it would be evolutionarily useful if we were made to live not only with a recognition of the varying kinship relationships in our family history, but also with a consciousness that in the future we will become active role representatives and role-players in reflection of and in relationship to that history.

Just as research studies in linguistics and brain organization tell us that every human baby is born with a neuronal organization that includes an innate readiness to recognize different kinds of words (nouns, verbs, numbers regardless of differing languages and symbolic forms) as well as an innate sense of grammatical structure, I posit that future research will show that children come to this planet also pre-set and ready to discover and understand that there are kinship categories such as mothers, fathers, parents to those mothers and fathers, siblings of that mother and father as well as siblings of one's own. I believe this immanent readiness for social structure and social relationships prepares them to make sense of those external realities the instant they encounter them in the world at large. As naturally as children are able and ready to hear and understand nouns, verbs and adjectives and the sentences that include them, I believe that they are similarly able and ready to experience and act appropriately to the complexity of kinship relationships with all its implications and variations

Children seem to be neurally prepared to perceive and behaviorally prepared to act appropriately as a member of a family. They come "knowing" that they are someone's child; that there are such categories and roles as mother and father (and later, prepared to know that one is a husband and the other is wife, with culturally or innately determined role differentiations) and even if there were not siblings born before them that there are such things as sisters and brothers (with the implication that they come knowing there are such things as gender differences). They understand at once, when they encounter those occasions, that their parents also have had siblings and

accept at once the special intimacy that comes with relationships with aunts and uncles. They come prepared to eventually recognize (at the appropriate level of consciousness) that their parents have also had parents and even before they are conscious of the reality of that category, they come fully poised to experience and relish the special relationship that seems to instinctively exist between grandparents and grandchildren when they first encounter those doting figures.

If a child has had the misfortune of learning and experiencing that their parents were sorely wounded due to the neglect that their parents experienced in their own rearing -- innately knowing that all children need and have an inner expectation of experiencing such care -- their little hearts and compassionate souls immediately awaken the unspoken, perhaps also unconscious, but deeply felt wish that their parents could have been better cared for.

Children also seem to quickly recognize that their own maturational needs are less likely to be met as a consequence of their parents' childhood deficits of satisfaction of their needs by the genetically anticipated kinship figures at the genetically anticipated right age. This state of affairs starts a process of childhood parentification that has two different origins. One origin is the compassion that the child feels for their wounded parent. This compassion is long-lasting, often even life-long lasting. The other origin is the (often shatteringly disappointed) belief that their efforts at filling the holes in the roles that have produced deficits in their parents maturational processes will somehow result in their parents finally being able to parent them.

Their compassion drives them to try to replace the missing kinship figure with a portion of their own beings. My speculation is that they construct out of their stem selves, coupled with their inner knowledge of kinship relations and their functions, a virtual mother for their mother. A mother "entity," living within the child's body and utilizing some of the child's life energies (however that is measured and determined - libido, life force, whatever) totally separate and serving a different host than the rest of the child's energy systems. The natural host of the child is its own soul, so to speak. That part of the self that is worthy, valued, deserving of respect and with rights to move with self interest in tandem with the world at large. This compassion-born "entity" draws energy from the child that would ordinarily

fall in its own soul's jurisdiction and uses it in the service not of the *self*, but of the *other*, the mother or father in need. Thus there are then two masters living within that child. One a soul that has a time-line of maturation and life expectations in its own service and the other, an "entity" which draws a line of credit draining the resources from the rightful owner of being that is called by that child's name.

But that hard-working child doesn't give up hope that it will get its own needs met. Unfortunately however, it is willing to go on that life-long detour of propping up the crippled parent in the hope that the parent will someday "grow up" and be able to return the favor and become the wished-for, longed-for parent to themselves - they were expected to be in the first place.

I have seen so many adults in psychotherapy sessions, who, when they are in the presence of someone representing that injured, but deeply-loved part of their real parent, well up with sympathy, pity and compassion that is both heart-warming and heart-wrenching to observe. Heart-warming because it is usually in stark contrast to the bitterness that such adult clients feel to some other aspect of their real parent. And also heart-warming to see any human being so moved and motivated to help by the plight of another. Heart-wrenching, because they cry the cry of a little child who is sorely burdened with the task of ameliorating the wounds of the adult who was supposed to take care of them.

It is no wonder that remembrance of - and respect for - ancestors exists in virtually every society on earth. Positive and negative information of the details of family member's lives in the past powerfully (automatically and unconsciously) influences what parts (roles) we will play and with whom in the realization of our own destinies.

In this workshop we will review the notion of Holes in Roles and see how the clients who have unwittingly filled the holes in the roles that should have been the suppliers of their parents maturational needs have distorted their own personalities and led to dysfunctional patterns in their adult lives and adult partner choices. Most importantly we will demonstrate and teach how to release clients from those burdensome tasks thus enabling them to live more satisfying lives in their partnerships and within their actual family structures.