The Complexity of Connection:

Writings from the Stone Center’s Jean Baker Miller Training Institute

Student's Name:

Institution
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Relationships as Developmental Achievements

In this book the three scholars deepen and expand the centre’s psychology connectivity theory that is the core for human development and growth. In this extensive and integrative volume the three scholars present a practical examination and philosophy of both connectivity and disconnection at the individual as well as societal levels. Basically, thirteen chapters comprised in this text cover issues relating to sexual orientation, ethnicity and experience of the race and gender relationships by examining various ways in which people can come together irrespective of their differences or disagreements.

Nonetheless, besides philosophical theory, the book presents a material that is practical by discussing the implications of psychotherapy theory that summarizes human development and how an individual ethically interacts with others as a functional person. Historically, the kinds of projects that the centre has supported are wide and concern a varying human behavior, such as African partner violence, development of connections, harassment and bullying, empowering vulnerable children, early childhood studies, gender and teacher studies, men and women’s self-esteem, recovery from sexual harassment among many others. Mutual collaboration between the Stone Center’s Jean Baker Miller Training Institute and Centre for Research on Women has facilitated the inter-disciplinary research, training and release of various publications that have in overall helped to shape the world. The book explores fundamental and deep issues embracing the vision of advanced knowledge for working and survival. Marilyn Newman in her review noted the book’s impressive ability to influence the leader in a considerable manner due to its
compassionate, accurate and multifaceted understanding of what heals and detours human relationships.

In chapter one, toward competence and connection, the desire and pursuance of connection considering the Stone Centre model are presented as the keys factors in human life while the element of isolation and chronic disconnection is taken as the most common source of human sufferings (p.11). Despite human inability to authentically represent in a relationship, one must detach falsification from suppression of authentic responses, while at the same time accepting the fact that we cannot impact relationships of other people where we have interests. The theme explored in this text is that of individual’s competence, need to connect, be creative in the modern world that values individual’s goals and competition that results to conflict of primarily relational individuals. Nonetheless, the book brings out the sense of immobilization, isolation, relational incompetence and self-esteem.

In this book, the authors connect the dominance of competence with masculinity (pp. 13-14). However, both relational and instrumental competence portray the ability to bring a difference in the relationship or cause a difference of all individuals in a relationship. Moreover, such a capacity does not necessarily refer to influencing other people, but instead considers mutual influence. This follows a statement given by Jean Baker Miller, who stated that for an individual to grow in a relationship, both individuals must grow. As such, the authors feel that it is being in touch with both our feelings and own hearts, that we can touch other people’s hearts and help them grow.

In chapter two, Relational Resilience, one of the authors, Judith Jordan, says that life subjects all humanity to suffering and tension, and that individuals, as well as relationships, are
circumvented by forces that cause pain and threat to dissolutions while, at the same time, causing pain, thus the need for transformation or relational resilience. On page 28 the author indicates that people’s inability to shift from disconnection to connection could result to isolation and immobilization that might turn into a prison. Judith goes further and discusses the traditional perception of resilience proposing that traumas experienced in life can lead to the burning desire to help others. The author goes on stating that helping others alleviates isolation and private pain from humans. Nonetheless, the author stresses that nobody would choose to undergo pain, but such pain provides a valuable lesson and develops an individual wisdom. In this book the authors also give a description of how relational resilience can be applied as a therapy to guard against vulnerability, hence assisting an individual to develop confidence, flexibility and awareness through reworking and negotiation of emphatic failures and misunderstanding.

In chapter three, Transforming Disconnection, the book explores self-sufficiency models and autonomy by examining how the element of separation is a key to the human condition. Notably, the authors argue that disconnection from other people forms the beginning of human suffering. To support this, a number of psychoanalysis’s theories are discussed elucidating the fact that people bear distinct habitual ways of responding to certain conditions leaving them vulnerable to disconnection. With the goal of therapy being to transform disconnections to connections, the chapter concludes that the ability to understand one’s disconnection is a key to developing a compassionate attitude that helps an individual to identify his or her needs, causes of disconnection and the need for reconnection (p. 63).

Part two of this book addresses the relationship. Chapters seven and eight cover relational possibilities and racial images and hoe racialism affects women. Moreover, therapy in groups and limited therapy topics are covered in chapters ten and twelve. Chapter eleven covers the use
of models to understand both men and boys, whereas chapter thirteen dwells on utilization of relational thinking in the workplace and, more so, the entire organization. The authors express their goal of writing this book as to help the readers to find a sense of possibility and resilience. The authors have discussed the ideas underlying the marriage, religion, child bearing and upbringing and, more importantly, bring out gender identity in consideration of the family institutions. However, the basic question that the authors have tried to explore is what causes a change of a therapy? In this regard the authors agree that skills learnt in the treatment room can be used to effect the change through commitment to learning and responsiveness. The authors conclude by stating that through our ability and commitment to connection we are able to get a hope.

This book is provocative and well-structured. It raised quite a number of questions which it also follows with concrete answers. Notably, the book is highly suitable for individuals whose minds can accommodate to both uncertainties and opportunities, but, on the other hand, is highly unsuitable for people who are firmly held to a certain philosophy of treatment. The book explores practical considerations including short-term therapy and periodic counseling (p. 265). It portrays presentation of problems as a way of shaping treatment with no particular way of given consideration as the most favorable one for all individuals. The book focuses on the processes by stressing them as the primary therapeutic ingredient in the relationship as working together between a client and the therapist (p. 266). The authors express that no matter the course of treatment, it is always beneficial to be aware of transitions and shifts to better address the issues brought forward during the treatment course. In this regard the client will return to the path of development and fulfill his or her potential to the optimum, while, at the same time, adjusting to the prevailing demands and shifts. Regrettably, the danger arises where people’s
coping strategies are rendered paralyzed, hence forcing them to retreat to their old coping patterns. People in time of stress tend to resort to what they understand best (p. 262). In conclusion, this informative book excellently presents a thoughtful map for the growth, development of ourselves and mores of our patients.
Reference


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