

Tuesday, May 18, 2010

LIVING RELATIONSHIPS

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Join our book club

Love to read but no time for book club meetings?

Join our virtual book club.

The local Moms at SouthJersey.MomsLikeMe.com have launched a monthly online book club.

This month's pick is Wally Lamb's "The Hour I First Believed," and a new book will be selected soon.

Join the fun and the rousing discussions at //southjersey.momslikeme.com/members/

JournalActions.aspx?g=437397&m=10857843&source=stream. While you're there, check out our contests, message boards, hot tips, family-friendly events calendar and more.

PET OF THE WEEK



Meet Donny

Donny, who is between 10 months and 1-year-old, is a beagle/Jack Russell mix.

He is tan and white in color, and is a small, active and playful dog.

Donny will do best in a home where he'll get exercise daily or have access to a fenced-in yard where he can run around.

He walks well on a leash, knows how to sit and will make a great little companion.

If you are interested in making room in your family for Donny, visit The Animal Orphanage, 419 Cooper Road (next to the Kresson Fire Station), Voorhees. Call (856) 627-9111 or visit www.theanimalorphanage.org

LIVING Lineup

- SUNDAY
S.J. Living
- MONDAY
Health & Wellness
- TUESDAY
Relationships
- WEDNESDAY
Taste
- THURSDAY
Style & Shopping
- FRIDAY
S.J. Scene
- SATURDAY
Home & Garden

“If I put you in a room with a hundred people, you'll choose the person with the same conflict as you.”

'Magnetic Partners,' by Dr. Stephen Betchen



ThinkStock

What is your master conflict? According to author and therapist Dr. Stephen Betchen, it could be the driving force behind all of your marital conflicts, big and small.

'Magnetic Partners'

With a new book in stores, a Cherry Hill therapist shares how what attracts you to each other in the first place also threatens to drive you apart

By LU HANESSIAN
For the Courier-Post

Oscar Wilde once said the two most difficult things for us in life are longing for our heart's desire and getting it.

Today, he'd have a reality show.

Maybe something such as NBC's "The Marriage Ref," in which couples fight for their rights, but not for resolution of their conflicts. Host and comedian Tom Papa and his celebrity panel discuss (mock) the intensely divisive (often bizarre) disagreements plaguing American couples across the country. They are couples who have agreed to share their fetishes, unmet needs, frustrations and stalemates on a jumbo screen while studio and home audiences howl with laughter.

Of course, when the cameras stop taping, the conflicts rage on.

What are the couples really fighting about? Whether we are at odds on television or within the privacy of our bedrooms, the same things drive every couple into its vicious circles, chronic ruts,



DOUGLAS M. BOVITT/Courier-Post

A copy of Dr. Stephen Betchen's new book, 'Magnetic Partners,' sits on a couch in his Cherry Hill office.

emotional resignations, intimacy voids, bitter feuds or divorce.

Master conflict

"Their master conflict," says Dr. Stephen Betchen, Cherry Hill marital and sex therapist and author of the new book

See **MAGNETIC**, Page 2D

MASTER CONFLICT & DIVORCE

■ What is divorce about from a master conflict perspective?

"When the master conflict has either been out of control far too long and has worn the couple down or has produced some catastrophic symptoms, like an affair that render the relationship irreparable."

■ What are irreconcilable differences really about?

"Usually, when one partner gets control over their master conflict and the other doesn't, for example, success vs. sabotage conflict. One partner may choose not to limit himself/herself any longer, but the other continues to do so, thus holding back both partners."

■ Does the master conflict determine "how" couples divorce?

"People divorce the way they marry. I've even seen post-divorce couples try to hold onto the dynamic which, as a consequence, may allow the conflict to bleed into their new relationships and ruin them."

Know a great baby sitter?

Ah, the coveted baby sitter. She is a parent's trusted helper, the go-to gal in times of scheduling crisis or the occasional date night.

And a longtime favorite baby sitter also helps families establish happy memories of the growing up years.

What would we do without her? If you have found a brag-worthy baby sitter, we want to hear about her.

Your story could be part of an upcoming Relationships article.

Send an e-mail to Kim Mulford at kmulford@courierpostonline.com

Don't forget to include your name and phone number.

Teach kids not to tolerate bullying

"Hey, wartface!" says the girl. "Your head is shaped like a melon. You smell and your teeth are buck. Get some braces and some zit cream!"

Is this the sound of a typical fifth-grader or a sign of something more troubling?

Psychologists and educational experts in bullying fear these kinds of poison arrows are often rationalized by adults as "typical" and, therefore, some kind of rite of passage for unfortunate students who happen to be the recipients.

Phoebe Prince, 15, came to Massachusetts from Ireland with her sister and parents in pursuit of the American Dream:

Lu Hanessian
Driving Lessons



good school, good neighborhood, good life for hard-working parents who wanted the best for their kids.

She was a top student with a kind heart, by all accounts from her friends and family, who was beautiful inside and out. She caught the eye of a popular football player and soon a small mob of angry and jealous classmates decided to alienate and vilify her, and worse, torment her.

She was called demeaning names, cornered and targeted with epithets and empty soda cans. One day, a few months ago, she decided she couldn't face the pain of exclusion and bullying anymore. Although she committed suicide, criminal charges were filed against nine students who "bullied her to death."

The shocking aspects, of course, are the degree of cruelty, the age of the aggressors, Phoebe's final despair — and the fact that many school officials knew what was going on, yet looked the other way.

Not every teacher and principal can or should

See **BULLYING**, Page 2D

Magnetic/Is one master conflict driving you apart?

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"Magnetic Partners: Discover How the Hidden Conflict That Once Attracted You to Each Other is Now Driving You Apart" (Free Press, Simon & Schuster, 2010).

After working with countless couples for more than 30 years, Betchen came to the realization the big, hairy arguments couples brought to his office were not the real conflicts after all.

"What I noticed was couples kept having the same argument over and over again, so rather than focusing on their content I focused more on their process, on how they argued: It seemed like one argument. I began to find that as I focused on that one issue with that couple, things appeared simpler. Couples got the feeling they had one main problem, instead of so many smaller ones."

Betchen refers to this one main problem as our "master conflict, a powerful conflict that largely controls your relationship."

It's not a conflict simply because it creates tension between two partners, but because it originates within each, an inner war that each person brings to the relationship. Together, this shared conflict is often what draws us together, yet winds up pushing us apart — unless we master it.

The not-so-simple truth is we will carry our master conflict with us wherever we go and with whomever we marry or date. It's the story of our lives, deeply embedded in our memories, patterns, perceptions and experiences. We find people whom we love at arm's length or who never quite understand us or with whom we can unconsciously maintain our fear of success. It's our way of "riding the brakes," he says.

Says Dr. Carole Moretz, "As master conflict theory explains, we find someone with whom our conflict fits." Moretz is a certified sex therapist at Lehigh Valley Health Network in Allentown, Pa. "In that way, neither of us gets to resolve our own and we have a great place to divert our attention."

Says Jay Lappin, a social worker who is Family Therapy Director at Centra in Marlton, "(Betchen's) approach is both preventative and curative. Marriages are under tremendous pressures these days. You need navigational tools to chart these waters and understanding your master conflict helps you find the buoys."

Betchen adds, "We want freedom and we want commitment. We can live in that limbo and pain instead of choosing. If you want to grow and get healthy, you can make a decision. Compromise means change and change usually brings with it anxiety and depression that comes with a loss of the way things are or were."

Driving themes

In his book, Betchen identifies a range of master conflict themes. Power versus passivity is the most common combination and one of the most destructive, he says. In this master conflict, both partners are conflicted about "how much power and responsibility they should take in the relationship."

"I'll never forget when a woman came in and was complaining that her husband wasn't speaking to her. He was a really contained guy, not a talker. I stuck with them, doing a history, and while I had him on a roll, I asked him, 'Listen. While you're talking, if you want to register to any complaints about the marriage go



DOUGLAS M. BOVITT/Courier-Post
Dr. Stephen Betchen discusses his new book, 'Magnetic Partners,' in his Cherry Hill office.

Master Conflicts

Author and therapist Dr. Stephen Betchen identifies a range of 'master conflicts,' including these most common themes:

- Power vs. passivity
- Conformity vs. rebellion
- Closeness vs. distance
- Getting your needs met vs. caretaking
- Justice vs. injustice
- Success vs. sabotage (big vs. small)
- Specialness vs. ordinariness
- Adequacy vs. inadequacy
- Control vs. chaos
- Legitimacy vs. illegitimacy
- Person vs. object

ahead.' He began to say something, but three words in his wife jumped in and shut him down."

When couples can identify their individual or shared master conflict, they may begin to realize: They have the same or very similar conflict; they see they're both contributing; and they realize they are bound to repeat it with anyone else, so they want get help in their present relationship, and effectively "master the master conflict."

"I began to see when couples owned their conflicts, they stopped blaming each other," Betchen says.

Recognizing our conflict, how it has played out in our lives and how it's tied to our family of origin are part of the process. Yet, none of us easily can tolerate the ensuing anxiety and emotional pain that often accompanies change with-out the balm of empathy.

"When couples have more empathy for each other, they can tolerate the flare-ups," says Betchen. "If they both are on the same page, they can balance, resolve and choose one side of their conflict."

Befriending the conflict

Couples who begin to see themselves through a lens of awareness and compassion naturally see each other with less judgment. Our fear of getting closer becomes mitigated by our desire for deeper connection. We get stronger in the broken places, as Hemingway once wrote. And, we gradually dismantle the defenses that we built around our old wounds.

Betchen lists four of those defenses — denial, rationalization, projection and repression — within us and between us.

In denial, we turn a blind eye to the problem. In rationalization, we find a nice broom to sweep everything under the carpet. With projection, we deflect our flaws and faults onto our partner, where it's easier to criticize and complain than deal with our own issues.

Says Dr. Andrew Mercurio, "I think the theory that Betchen is espousing provides a gateway for understanding why couples get stuck in relationships." Mercurio is director of the Marriage and Family Therapy Program of the Alliance Graduate School of Counseling at Nyack College, N.Y.

"Many couples have no idea why they fight, why they're disconnected and conflicted. They don't know why they are reactive to the degree that they are. What his theory does is give us a nice lens to understand ourselves."

Different but same

What's the incentive for us to even consider looking at our

master conflict, let alone learning to master or manage it?

As Betchen says, "When we choose our first serious partner or spouse, we often have no idea what role our master conflict played in the choice. If that relationship ends and we still don't understand the role — we tend to focus on the one thing we think ruined us the first time — that's a dangerously narrow view."

Which is why, he says, we tend to swear we'll never marry another miser or cheater or alcoholic, only to find ourselves in a similar conflict over a slightly different theme.

The way out of our misery begins with our willingness to look a little deeper, Betchen points out. "If you really want to come to a better resolution of your conflict and save your relationship, you will have to fight these defense mechanisms by keeping them present in your consciousness."

Mercurio backs that. "The couple can say, 'Aha! Now I know.' It gives us a portal to gain knowledge about the conflict. Now it makes sense. Now I know why I love and hate you.' Now, for the first time, we can see ourselves in each other — that's where the empathy comes in. Master conflict theory adds a new dimension."

What we practice grows. If we focus on asking good questions of ourselves, we might find we stop interrogating our partners. If we practice seeing our mistakes and reactivity in a more compassionate way — "now why did I just snap like that?" — we may bite our nails less, spend more wisely and find ways of avoiding our pain.

When we develop a relationship with ourselves, we get to know ourselves. That bodes well for those moments when you must trust your gut on choosing a partner, noticing signs of trouble and breaking free of relationship ruts — together — that would otherwise cause you both considerable heartache.

Simply put, Betchen says, "Know your conflict, get it under control and let your radar do the work."

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THESE TIMES ARE FOR MONDAY MAY 17TH TO THURSDAY MAY 20TH

*PASS RESTRICTED
 *Adults Head (PG-13) 12:40, 2:15, 3:50, 5:25, 7:00, 8:35, 10:10
 *Letters To Juliet (PG) 10:00, 2:35, 5:05, 7:35, 10:05
 *Just Wright (PG) 11:55, 2:25, 4:55, 7:15, 9:35
 *Ironman 2 (PG-13) 12:00, 1:25, 2:50, 3:30, 4:30, 5:30, 6:30, 7:30, 8:30, 9:30, 10:30
 *A Night on the Earth Street Remake (R) 12:25, 2:50, 5:25, 7:50, 10:00
 *Furry Vengeance (PG) 1:40, 4:25, 7:05, 9:25

Kick-Ass (R) 1:40, 4:25, 7:05, 10:15
 Death at a Funeral (R) 7:55, 10:05
 Date Night (PG-13) 10:15, 2:40, 5:15, 7:40, 10:00
 How to Train Your Dragon (PG) (2 Dimensional) 12:20, 2:45, 5:10
 How to Train Your Dragon (PG) (2 Dimensional) 12:20
 *12/110 and 5/22/10
 Back to the Future (Showing at Midnight) (PG) 1:40, 4:25, 7:05, 9:25

NO PASSES-NO CLASSIC SUPERHEROS

Bullying/Empathy can aid the fight

Continued from Page 1D

jump on every comment made in passing by every student in every class and hallway. With passing comments flying on playgrounds, in classes and cafeterias, it would be a full-time job to investigate who said what to whom and in what context.

That's not an effective use of a school's time and energies. Neither is it always productive to call a student in to issue an insincere (and forced) apology to a classmate which often does little or nothing to stop the continued humiliation, exclusion and ridicule once they leave the front office.

More and more of our kids seem to be suffering from a massive empathy deficit — both the ones excoriating others and the ones on the receiving end. For schools and administrators to truly stand behind their "zero tolerance on bullying" policy, they might consider reframing the term "zero tolerance." In other words, the problem isn't enforcing "zero" tolerance — it's cultivat-

ing it. It's about fostering zero intolerance. But how?

We must reach kids on an emotional level. Brain science tells us that for empathy to be grown in the front of the brain, we must practice empathic relationship and mindful awareness with children. Kids literally can develop neural pathways for insight, morality and empathy in the mid pre-frontal cortex through these practices, activities and experiences.

If classmates mock a student who has buck teeth or glasses or a learning disability or a diagnosis like autism, they are causing pain to another person — because they are not practicing self-awareness or empathy for their own painful feelings.

In the absence of parents who instill empathy by modeling it themselves, teachers and principals are sometimes left to pick up the pieces at school. So, how can our schools make a difference in the lives of students who are teased, targeted and rejected — as well as in those who do the targeting?

Too often, we assume the student being teased or rejected is the one who needs social skills training and a good counselor to share his or her pain, but this misses the point and shifts the focus away from the real issue.

Effectively addressing — and preventing — bullying comes about by truly healing and nurturing relationship.

When kids are still young, something as simple as watching and discussing a class movie can transform minds and plant seeds of tolerance. Good examples are www.autismthemusical.com or "Temple Grandin" at www.templegrandin.com and DVDs and tool kits at <http://stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/adults/start-a-cam-paign.aspx>

Lu Hanessian is the author of 'Let the Baby Drive' (St. Martin's Press, 2004), former NBC anchor and host of 'Make Room for Baby' on Discovery Health Channel, the founder of www.parent2parent.com and WYSH Wear Your Spirit for Humanity (www.wear-yourspirit.com). Her book site is www.letthebabydrive.com

Admit you don't have same goals

Dear Carolyn:
Last week on our fourth anniversary, my girlfriend (we're both 36) told me she can no longer wait for me to propose and that if I'm not ready to get married she will have to break up with me. Silly me, I had no idea she was waiting.



married before and is afraid it will get worse in her late 30s, but I think it's unfair that I should be subjected to this ultimatum without any fair warning. What do you think we should do?

— GUY IN VA.
Maybe you weren't given fair warning; maybe

you were given plenty and missed it. Assigning blame doesn't serve much purpose right now.

What would be useful are the reasons you want "a year or two more to remain single" after being with someone for four years and when you're not exactly new at this being-a-grown-up thing.

E-mail Carolyn Hax at tellme@washpost.com or chat online with her at noon Fridays at www.washingtonpost.com. Write to her care of The Washington Post, Style Plus, 1150 15th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20071.

PROUD OF YOUR GRADUATE?

Congratulate them in front of over 181,000 readers on **Thursday, June 17th** in the Courier-Post Newspaper!

For graduates - college, high school, grammar school - or even preschool - it's a once in a lifetime event. For you, it's a chance to tell the world how proud you are of their accomplishments. Have your message and their picture printed in the paper! Just fill out the form below and mail it to us by Friday, June 4th. For photo-messages, enclose the photo with your order form. Sorry, no polaroids. We cannot return photos. Write your message of 20-words (including name) or less below, fill out the order form, include check or money order, or include credit card information, and mail to the address below.

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