

Recent Developments in Therapeutic Conversation

Part 3: Internalized Other Interviewing

November 2007 in Padua

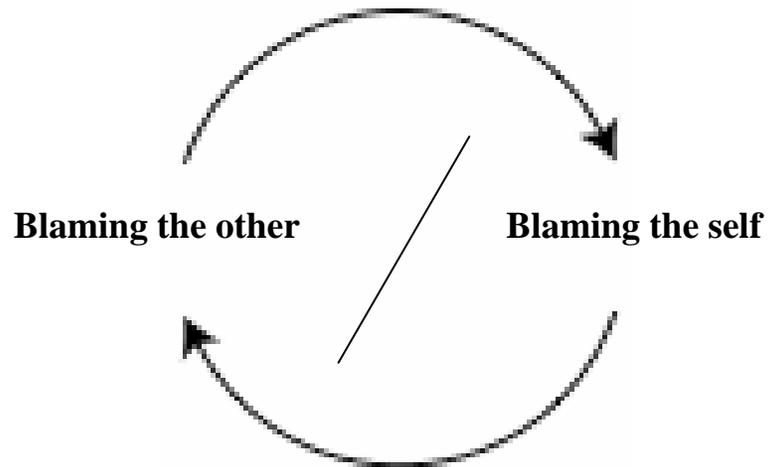
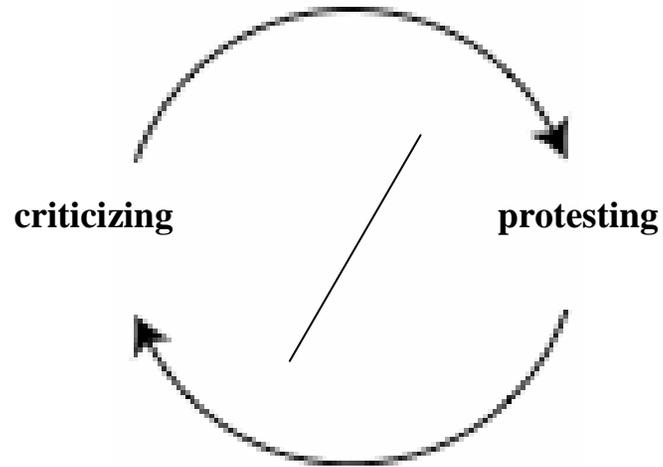
by Karl Tomm

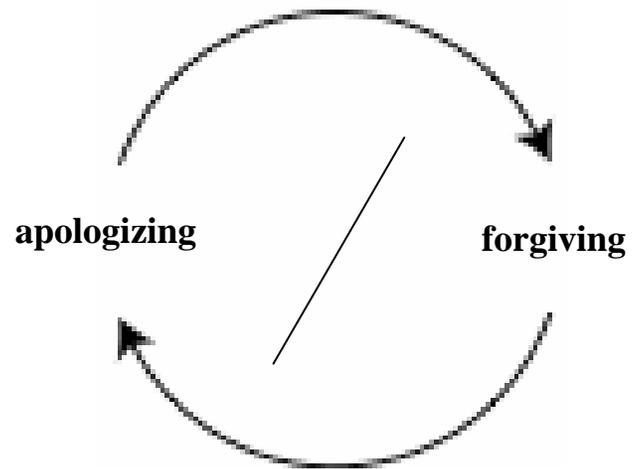
Clinical Example

Description of an interview with a middle aged man recovering from alcohol and drug abuse who had a sudden episode of suicidality

THE INTERNALIZED MOTHER







apologizing

forgiving

Personal steps to the method

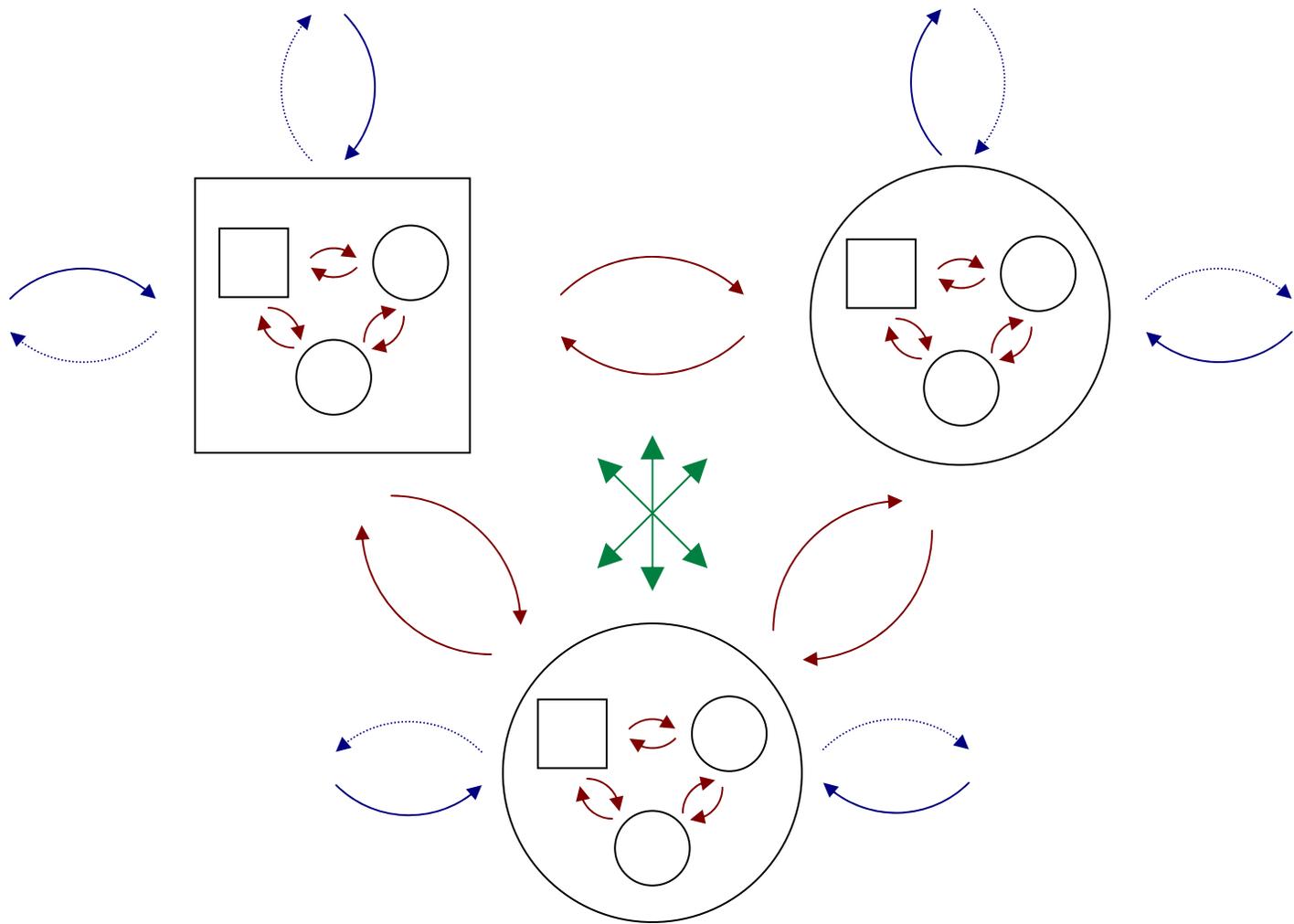
- 1967 - informal contact with Fritz Perls and superficial explorations in gestalt therapy
- 1968 - began training in family systems therapy and explored von Bertalanfy's systems theory
- 1972 - began exploring Bateson's theory of mind
- 1978 - initiated contact with the Milan team and began developing skills in systemic therapy
- 1984 - started collaborating with Michael White
- 1988 - David Epston described his work with a severely conflicted couple
- 1989 - Conference with G. Cecchin and M. White
- 1990 - Conference with D. Epston in Tulsa

A SOCIAL BASIS FOR THE “SELF”

The psychological self may be regarded as constituted by an internalized community and the patterns of interactions among the members of that community.

Where does the individual person exist?

- According to Maturana's biology the individual "self" arises in the unique reflections that occur at the intersection of a particular bodyhood and a particular personhood
- The experience and behavior of the "self" is not skin-bounded but is brought forth in the continuous interactions between a person and her/his medium including other actual persons



THE INTERNALIZED MOTHER



Three contrasting methods of enquiry about others

- Direct questions about the other
- Interpersonal perception questions
- Internalized other questions

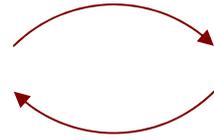
Three contrasting methods of enquiry about others

- Direct questions about the other
 - Privileges objective assumptions
- Interpersonal perception questions
 - Privileges subjective assumptions
- Internalized other questions
 - Privileges subjective assumptions and embodied knowledge



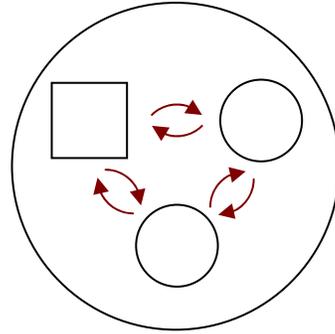
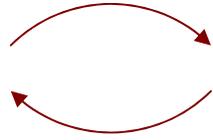
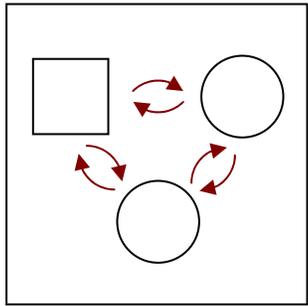
Matthew
Carpenter

depressed



angry

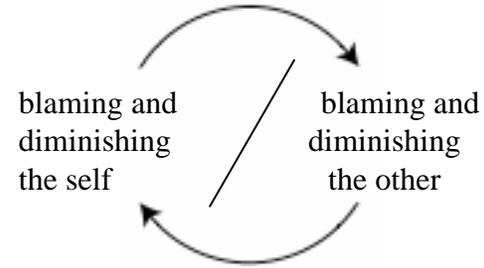
**One is “always already listening” to the
Internalized Other when relating to the Actual
Other.**



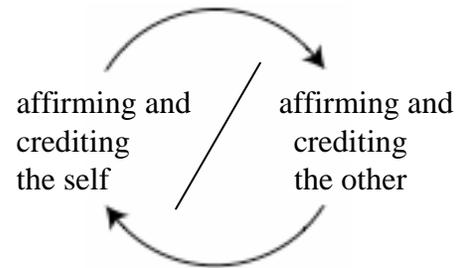


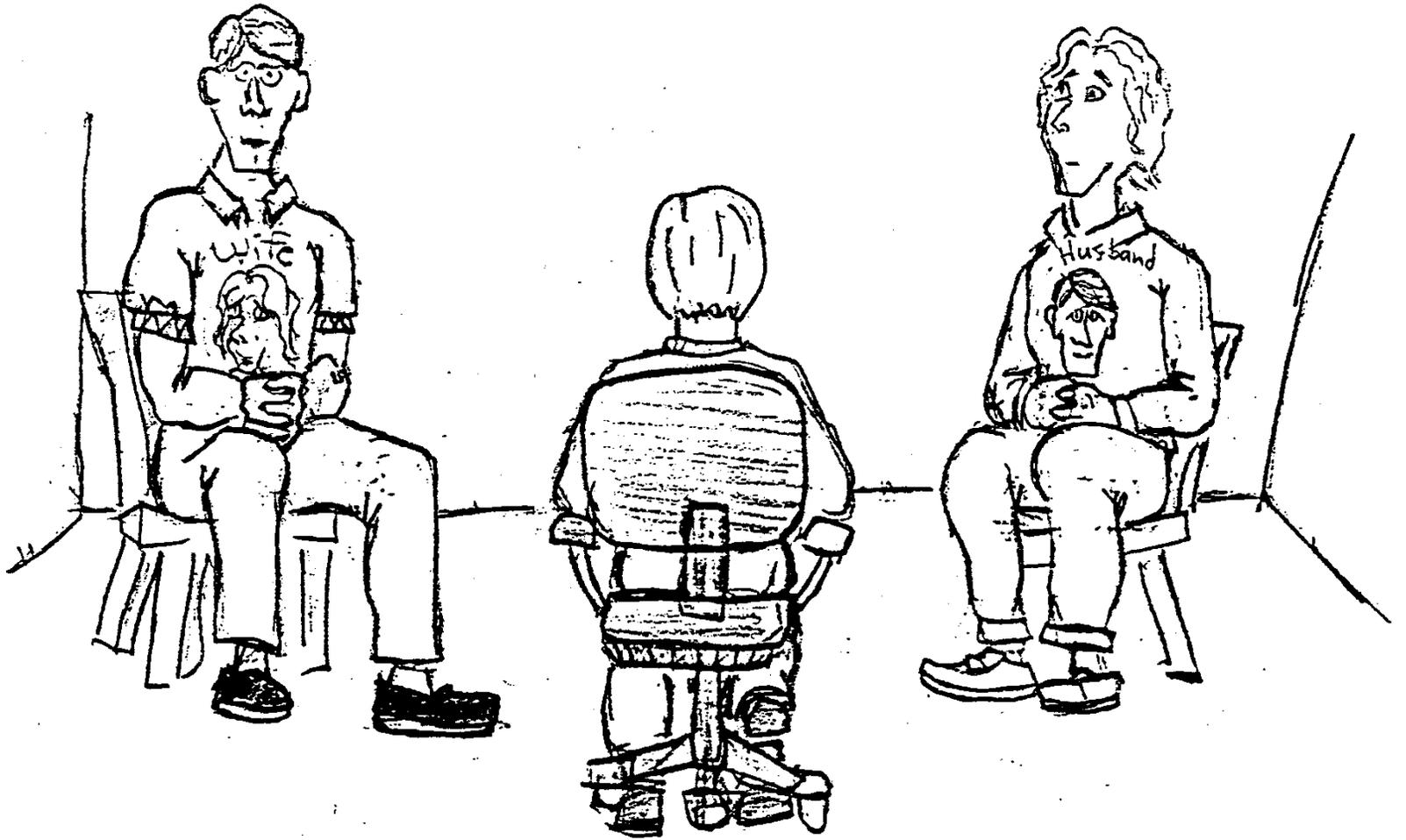
Northey

PIP



HIP





Matthew
10mm96

INTERNALIZED OTHER INTERVIEWING WITH CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS

- A 2-3 year old child in play will sometimes spontaneously enact the part of the parent or sibling
- Children as young as 3 can be interviewed as a parent
- Interviewing adolescents as a parent often results in the disclosure of salient covert issues so they can be talked about openly
- Parents are often amazed to discover that their children know them so well
- The capacity for self centered children to become more sensitive to and empathic with the experiences of others may be enhanced

INTERNALIZED OTHER INTERVIEWING

- **Potential effects in the respondent**
- stimulates deep curiosity about the experiences of the other
- generates empathy for the other by embodying the experiences of the other
- enables a shift from self-centeredness toward other-centeredness
- invites behavioral changes on the basis of increased experiential empathy
- if done in the presence of the actual other, creates conditions for feedback to correct erroneous ideas/beliefs about another
- extends one's understanding of the other's experience
- fosters greater self-esteem through the imagined appreciation of the other
- allows maturational change in the internalized other that could be liberating for the self
- enables possible future positive influences on the other through change in the internalized other
- revises or reforms previously internalized relationships

INTERNALIZED OTHER INTERVIEWING

- **Potential effects in the listener**
- stimulates reflection without “pressure” for an immediate response
- increases conscious awareness of one’s own experience
- gives possible words and meanings to previously unformulated experiences
- enhances awareness of the respondent’s understanding of one’s own experience and/or the lack thereof
- stimulates possible change through invitations to enter into the “distributed self” that is elicited and observed in the interview

INTERNALIZED OTHER INTERVIEWING

- **Potential effects in a relationship**
- stimulates reflection on past events that influence present patterns of interaction
- May attenuate conflict by re-directing the energy from outer criticism toward holding oneself accountable
- deconstructs individual components of pathologizing patterns of interaction
- fosters mutual appreciation and respect by activating an appreciative audience
- co-constructs healing and wellness patterns of interaction

ADVANTAGES OF “INTERNALIZED OTHER” INTERVIEWING

- Opens access to one’s “embodied” experience of another person’s experience.
- Increases one’s curiosity regarding the “actual” experiences of others.
- Enhances one’s awareness of another’s experiences as differing from one’s own.
- Increases one’s grounding in the experiences of others.
- Increases one’s capacity for interpersonal understanding and mutual acceptance.
- Often bypasses usual defense mechanisms in “overly therapized clients”

DISADVANTAGES OF ‘INTERNALIZED OTHER’ INTERVIEWING

- Can traumatize clients if not carried out with genuine compassion and respect for the clients
- Sometimes difficult for therapists to imagine the internalized other and formulate relevant questions
- Sometimes awkward for clients to be spontaneous enough to risk engaging in the experiment
- Sometimes difficult for respondents to answer questions from the experience of the other.
- Respondents sometimes try to “structure” the experience of others in answering according to their own interests.
- Questions and process can easily become extremely complex and confusing.

Additional Possibilities

- Interviewing a problem, emotion, or belief as a personified internalized other to explore its ‘intentions’ and effects on the person
- Interviewing multiple internalized others
- Interviewing the internalized other of the internalized other
- The method is limited only by the creativity of the therapist

A Brief Exercise

- Practice the method in small groups of 3 with an interviewer, interviewee and observer
- The interviewee decides who he or she would like to be interviewed as e.g. a client, close friend, personal family member, colleague, etc
- The interviewer is entitled to make mistakes and to learn from them
- The observer keeps track of time and offers reflections on the specific questions, the apparent effects, and the overall process

ARTICLES ON INTERNALIZED OTHER INTERVIEWING

Epston, David (1993) "Internalized Other Questioning with Couples: the New Zealand Version", Chapter 9, p. 183-196 in Therapeutic Conversations edited by Stephen Gilligan and Reese Price, published by Norton, New York.

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