

Explorers in the Underworld of Love

Every day it seems there is another #metoo story about sexual abuse breaking in the scandalised media involving a high profile man.

Fingers are pointed at the obviously inappropriate men, but is that too easy an explanation for systemic and historical abuse in human relationship dynamics?

Psychotherapist Lorella Ricci explores her response to the #metoo phenomena

As I read Léa Seydoux's interview in the Guardian, I realised why I was devouring the interviews of women who'd been abused by Harvey Weinstein. I wasn't surprised or outraged, I was more intrigued at how these accounts would meet my own experience. As she said, "Everyone knew what Harvey was up to and no one did anything". Money, power and indomitability are revered in our society. To one degree or another, we're all complicit.

I wasn't as sharp as Léa, though. I wasn't one of the ones who got away. I was more in the category of "the ones who stayed and didn't really know what was happening until they were deeply in it". My vulnerability wasn't youth or the need to advance my career. My vulnerability was my need to be desired and the hunger to be seen. A yearning to be loved that I'd stored so deeply in my psyche that even I couldn't feel it. So when they shot me a glance that made me feel special or delivered the line "My God, you're amazing" ... I was gone. Hook, line and sinker!

The wound of the narcissistic male interwove

seamlessly with my own Achilles heel. The engaging, confident, self-reliant exterior I presented was the perfect hunting ground for him to exercise his refined skill. Piercing the well-crafted armour was in itself a victory. On my side, the contact quenched an ancient thirst, drawn out of hiding by the lure of intimacy. But whilst intensity can mask as intimacy initially, it's only skin deep. He had neither the capacity nor the desire and withdrew unscathed, in search of a new, more controllable analgesic.

But there are layers of social, sexual and relational conditioning that influence this picture. And as appealing as it felt to blame, there was something about my seduceability and yearning that rocked me.

As obvious as it seems, the interesting thing about our unconscious wounds is that we can't really see them! As neuroscience and developmental psychology reveal, we don't have direct access to the **implicit memories** that are deeply influencing how we see and experience the world. They're stored in more rudimentary parts of the brain and imprinted onto our nervous system. From the time we're in-utero, the repeated experiences of neglect, shame, fear or lack of attunement, build expectations or prime us in the way we meet incoming experience. They are the building blocks of emotion that over time remain tragically hidden.

Explicit memories, on the other hand, are the ones that more overtly shape our identity. They start from about two years of age and hold retrievable facts and events that give me an autobiographical sense of "me". When I'm activated, I might instantly recognise behaviours that remind me of my dominating father or remember the countless decisions I made through-



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Find yourself repeating the same painful patterns? Feel like no matter how much work you do, real change never seems to happen? With Somatic Mindful Psychotherapy we drop below the story to study the subtle movements of the body, which reveal abundant information about the core, unconscious beliefs and habits that lie just outside our awareness. With embodied insight, change happens without force: direct, powerful and trustable. I also run Relational Meditation groups and Embodied Intimacy workshops. Through the direct experience of mindful self-study, we see, in the body, how we're organised around love and intimacy. My work weaves the wisdom of somatic psychotherapy, somatic meditation, and somatic sex education.

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out childhood to become invincible and not fall prey to my own needs. When I react from here, I feel congruent. Justified even.

But beneath these, another story is happening. The tightness in my chest, the short breath and the shot of energy that makes me want to jump out of my skin, are the hallmarks of implicit memory activity. But I'm completely oblivious to their influence. In fact, their presence feels like the intuition I've trusted all my life and are the 100% truth of what's happening.

When our core, unconscious material is stirred it hurts! So excruciating we impulsively jump away from it. We blame our partners, demand them to behave in ways that won't trigger us, or go into habitual, protective patterns so we don't have to feel it. Unwittingly, we recreate our reality.

In mindful, somatic psychotherapy we drop under the story and follow the threads of sensations, gestures, feelings and images into the body, where new information is revealed. As we stay present, we might get an image of a small child, terrified and screaming in a cement cell, with words like "I will always be alone". Whilst painful to feel, these undigested experiences feel eerily familiar, giving us embodied insights into layers of experience and ungraspable aspects of our relationships and our lives.

Tibetan Tantric traditions of somatic meditation give us an even deeper understanding of how the pre-verbal, cellular and energetic imprinting continues to prime the way we meet experience. Referred to as the second veils, or what we would call developmental trauma, none of us escape this. To paraphrase Reggie Ray, from his *Awakening the Heart* teachings, ego itself is a trauma response: we either "stop and turn toward this ravenous monster of our own suffering that has been chasing us our whole entire life" or continue to live a claustrophobic existence where we are never really able to be with our own experience.

Whilst it's beyond the scope of this article to go into detail on how these tantric practices work, there is a shift in approach that is subtle but significant.

Rather than focusing directly on the problem or tension, these practices train us to rest our awareness into the vastness of our being. The habit of centralising onto a limited, contracted, separate sense of self begins to loosen, allowing us to meet and integrate these painfully encoded, undigested core beliefs from a grounded, open space of warmth and tenderness. No longer all of who we are, they become a ripple in the ocean of our being.



What can we glean from this? Things are not what they seem. With a willingness to question our solidity and the capacity to turn towards the pain of our reactivity, a place of profound spiritual practice reveals itself: intimacy. When we explore this terrain in mindfulness and refined sensuality, our mutual presence magnifies the field of energy, concentration and curiosity, allowing us to meet the inevitable triggers in a way that we can stay present, listen and feel. Rather than the problems we avoid they are the poison that we seek, allowing us to slowly unravel the tangled threads of our unconscious conditioning.

As explorers in the underworld of love, we are tracking our own deception and fear, together. Between the perception of raw, uncomfortable *feeling* and the *thirst* in the cells to move back into their well-worn grooves of reactivity, lies a **gap**. A gap of stillness. A gap in which to rest. A gap in the chain, where the cycle is broken. As we welcome the raw, *formless* energy into this space before it crosses the threshold into its habitual *form*, we meet experi-

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ence just as it is, and breathe. Freedom. And with it, a lifetime of our particular personal, cultural, sexual and relational conditioning is revealed.

We are all swimming in a sea of projection and deceit. But as long as we remain disconnected from the brilliance within our own being, the pain and the impulses of our unconscious wounds are simply too intolerable to feel. We know it's happening and yet we do nothing. Harvey Weinstein's behaviour sparks an uproar that wakes us from our collective sleep. To a certain degree, darkness is brought into light. But there's an invitation to inquire much deeper.

Our relationships are founded on unseen patterns and protective mechanisms from early childhood, that without awareness recreate our suffering and cause each other so much pain. As we welcome them with tenderness and love, we discover a new-found response-ability. With courage, we can begin to walk together side-by-side, supporting each other in the unraveling of this mysterious and exquisite journey of being human.

