

Each couple that attends me for couples therapy brings a unique complex of problems. Each couple present a unique portrait of their marriage and of their problem-situation. Their problems are presented in the context of a unique drama or narrative. Each couple could create its own drama, novel, or soap-opera to reveal its problems. They would have their own plot, cast of characters, history, personality types, life-circumstance, and specific problems. Given that each story is so different, how does one even know where to begin, you might ask. However, things are not quite what they seem.

Despite these apparently substantial differences, there are core similarities between couples. All couples behaviour is shaped by basic and common motives, conflicts, and needs. In my work, I have to cut my way past the briars and barbed wire of everyday details to get at the core issues and concerns that lie behind the infinite complexity of peoples life situations. Behind this distress, each couple are very similar in their humanity. The things about which they are really concerned are actually quite limited. Behind everyday details a couple's life is influenced by basic motives, needs, and conflicts. These motives, needs, and conflicts affect all of us. The manner in which these concerns are addressed in the life of the couple determine their problems and relationship satisfaction. I want to help you in this chapter to understand what your deepest concerns are, and how these might cause your particular relationship problems and successes.

In my work in training therapists I encourage therapists to work with the deeper essentials, and not just with the superficial complaints. There are different layers to a problem. Despite a person's conviction that they have a particular and discreet problem, it is extremely rare not to find the problem to be symptomatic of a range of parallel difficulties around a similar theme. People do not realise that the problems they are experiencing at work, with their partners, with parenting, or with themselves are all identical but the *appear* to be totally different. In other words, all of your problems are in-character for you. They have a predictable shape, structure, feeling, and outcome that are strangely familiar to you. The "Her-I-go-again" feeling. We like to think that our problem is out-of-character and that if we could get rid of the particular problem then we would be our old selves again. Now this certainly is the case when some outside event or traumas causes a problem. But even in these situations we respond in-character. (People cope with grief and dying in-character for them. The depressive person will respond to grief with a despair and conviction that life is depressing and will close in more on themselves. While another person will experience the awful sorrow and loneliness, but will still continue on regardless with an admirable bravery and courage.)

I'll give you an example. John came with a sexual problem where he felt he had lost his desire for sex and was feeling guilty, inadequate, and somewhat depressed about the whole thing. He was in a good relationship but he felt if he could sort this out things would be fine. He wanted me to help. This was the superficial problem. In stripping a problem down to its skeleton (to its characterological structure) one can see the problem in terms of three basic human categories: Activity-Passivity; Self-Indulgence-Other-Indulgence; and Pleasure-enhancing-Pain Avoiding.

Every single human being operates under the influence of these basic motivations. So in these terms I could say to John that his problem could be summarised by his passivity, his tendency to be focused on others, and his tendency to avoid pain in his life rather than enhance pleasure. When shaped like this it was not surprising for John to say, that is actually the story of his whole life and that his sexual problem was in-character for him. We can see then that the problem is not just a sexual problem - it is a personality problem. When talking to him I discovered in all areas of his life he took little effort to build active pleasure into his own living; he tended to wait for things to happen in life; and he tended to be conservative in trying not to make mistakes and to play it safe.

There are six levels of structure that give determine your life problems. These levels may be conscious, subconscious, or unconscious to us. In physical terms, one could compare the levels to the levels of bodily structure where our most basic life force emerges from our mind o brain.

1.	Our existential concerns.	Unconscious	Soul	Heart & Brain
2.	Our motivating concerns.	Sub-conscious	Mind	Lungs& Organs
3.	Our problem-solving style.	Pre-conscious	Heart	Skeleton
4.	Our emotional style.	Pre-conscious	Behaviour	Muscles
5.	Our life-situation.	Conscious	Place	Skin
6.	Our specific problem.	Conscious	Event	Clothing

Therefore to understand your specific problem it is very wise to consider the skeleton on which it is hanging. To understand why your clothes don't fit, consider he skeleton on which they are hanging. Some people come in to counselling and think that by altering the clothes, without measuring the body, will solve the problem!

Your deepest conflicts and concerns:

The deepest concerns of your life, which affect your disposition toward life, are existential. By existential I mean, that they have to do with your very existence as a human being on earth. Existential concerns are thus concerns for every living human being. They are unalterable anxieties that come with your body and very existence. Great anthropologists, philosophers, theologians, and mythologists have studied these issues in great death. They have examined closely the common anxieties, concerns, and dreads of humanity not just today, but throughout history. They have looked at stories, myths, religions, primitive societies, and evolution over thousands of years. In doing so they have discovered the most enlightening things about humanity, and the most worrying things. Despite our sense of unique significance and importance it is sobering to see our behaviour as people as part of a pattern of behaviour since the dawn of man. You can begin to realise that the anxieties and concerns that worry you and bother you are, when you change the details, are similar to those of primitive man. You think what is bothering you is that your teenage children are causing you distress, when at its most fundamental level it is your existential difficulty in coping with helplessness and lack of control. In my detailed study of anthropology and in particular the work of Ernest Becker, I discovered four absolutely central and non-negotiable anxieties that drive and determine how you exist in your world. These may seem strange, but if you bear with me a little I will explain how they are relevant to your everyday life. There are four problems you have as a consequence of being born, of being human. These four conditions are part of your contract with God, as it were, and which you forever seek to deny or alter. The core of your problems as a

human being on earth is as a consequence of your rejection of the conditions of life! You reject the very conditions of life. In such a rejection you are forever at war with yourself, or at war with the world. This happens to varying degrees. But this is at the heart of the problem of being human. Your rejection of these conditions. This is actually then a religious more than a psychological problem. We are talking here about your deepest unconscious disposition toward life.