

# Roads to Reconnection

The E-Journal for Bonnie Miller's Inter-Action Consulting  
Writing about the ideas, tools and practices of reconnecting life to living.

In this issue: Shopping in the Wrong Pair of Shoes

## Shopping in the wrong pair of shoe

Have you ever had a pair of shoes that you hung onto even though they were virtually unwearable? Shoes that pinch, with awkward heels or bits that rub against the back of your foot? I've had shoes with nails that come through the bottom, straps that make the arch bleed, and still, I keep them around. And when I wear them- pray you are not in my company. I get distracted, unable to focus on your talk. I become cranky, impatient. Shopping decisions are rushed, great bargains overlooked. I may be carrying on an inner dialogue, cursing the shoes, cursing my feet, cursing the very floor I walk on.

Come home, take them off, put my feet up. Time to get rid of those shoes, wouldn't you agree?

## Externalizing Conversations- Welcome to the Better Shoe Store

Last issue, we looked at Externalizing conversations, and the idea of making the problem separate from the person. Today's metaphor of shoes (prompted no doubt by last month's holiday shopping) will be applied to problems of mood, and a personal relationship with moods that cause discomfort to us.

In coming issues, I'll talk about externalizing problems that are based in physical conditions, such as a diabetes, asthma or learning disabilities.

and although I wrote about Externalizing and Depression in last issue, this month I want to look at how other models of thinking can be used in an Externalizing conversation.

**It's all about Fashion- Biology, Social Learning, or Psychoanalysis?**

The field of therapy is subject to fashions and trends, just like any other area of living. Yesterday's innovation becomes today's quaint theory. But some ideas in therapy have more staying power than others- like steel toes or platform heels, some

## An Invitation to Practice-

I'd love to take you through this process.

If you want to try it, send me an email with 'the Problem is the problem' in the subject line, and I will put you on a separate list. Once you are on this list, you will receive a series of short exercises that will take you through some steps to externalize a problem, and explore your relationship with it.

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More Information about On-line counselling

If forums and journaling work for you, then on-line counselling might also be a good method when you want to change your relationships to problems.

On-line counselling is not time-synchronized- you can write when it is convenient, and I will respond within two days time.

I respond by placing my comments in the body of your message- the

therapy models have continued uses and die-hard fans. Some popular ways of thinking about mood problems include the biological explanation, the social learning explanation and the psychoanalytic, or insight explanation.

I'd like to look at how these models invite us to respond to problems of mood.

If we think of our problem of mood as being chemically or physically based then we need to address our biology, and stick to the program until something changes.

If we think we've learned to be weak, dependant or indecisive (fill in the blank, here)- then we need to study something new, change our behaviour and apply self-discipline to avoid going back to old habits.

If we think of ourselves as having hidden depths and problems with causes unknown to us, then we will need someone to help us peel back our layers, and interpret us to ourselves.

All these models for understanding personal difficulties of mood and thinking place the problem inside us, and require we do something to ourselves, with some expert help, to make us different, or at least , behave differently.

I don't want to argue with a biological explanation, or a social explanation, or even, really, with the root-causes explanation- because all of these explanations may have some value. But we may be using them to explain the wrong thing- diagnosing and treating ourselves, instead of diagnosing and treating the problem.

**It's like having a toe cut off, instead of buying better fitting shoes.**

And that just doesn't sound like very much fun to me.

What happens if we go along with the idea that the Problem the problem, and apply our thinking to that? If it is the problem that is the problem then, for me at least, the project becomes a little bit more interesting, and possibly a lot less painful.

We can then use the models of biology, social learning and psychoanalysis to answer the question: "What is keeping this problem alive and well? What makes it such a powerful influence?"

Let's take an example- I'll pick a popular one: Depression. Now let's apply our explanation models to see what we might discover.

**Biological factors:** Depression, we may discover, thrives in the dark, on a poor diet and little exercise. Some breeds of Depression thrive on very little sleep, and try to keep us up all night. Or, it may be a hibernating breed, preferring to sleep most of the day and night. It may prefer a particular shape and style of body to live in, and will do its best to get us to provide it with that type of body. It is generally slothful, and loathes exercise. It hates fresh air, sunshine (real or artificial) and most forms

result reads more like a conversation than a letter.

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of pampering. You may know other things about Depression's biology- these are just examples.

**Social-Learning explanations:** By investigating the life story of Depression, we may learn what age we were when it first moved into our lives. We can find out if it entered adolescence when we did, and if it ever grew up. Or perhaps it has always been MUCH older than we are, with a 'wisdom' that is difficult to counter. We may learn what social habits or activities encouraged its presence- and we might come to understand that Depression is welcome and familiar in our parent's home- that there is a place set for it at dinner, and that it contributes regularly to the conversations. We might discover that Depression loves alcohol, or prefers women to men as its bosom companions. We might see that Depression came to be a companion in our lives when something shocking and out of our control happened in our childhood. We might come to see that Depression grew stronger with each rejecting experience at school, or each crisis in our family. We might also realize that Depression is a diligent journal keeper- recording each highlight in its dark history in never-fading ink, and preferring to ignore any pleasant times or our personal achievements. Depression records its own achievements and successes- it can be very self-absorbed.

**Psychoanalysis:** We can take Depression to analysis- talk about how its relationships to family members, what lessons it learned, and from whom. We can certainly find out how Depression feels about its history, uncover its sense of the future. We can explore how it views others and whether or not it likes to hang around with Suspicion, Worry or Criticism as mates. We can interview Depression and find out what it thinks about itself. We can put it on medication if that seems right, or subject it to other recommended treatments.

### What those shoes get me doing

As we study Depression we can also notice our ideas and relationship to it. We could notice how close we are to Depression, how intimately it sits with us. We might notice how often Depression is monopolizing our conversations, both with ourselves and with others. We could notice how often we are doing what Depression wants to do, instead of we might like. We might even find that Depression is so in charge of our schedule that we have forgotten what we like to do, and have set those things completely aside. We might attend to how many of our friends Depression has dropped and who Depression prefers to hang out with.

Because with this shift in how we think, from "I am Depressed" to "I am living with Depression", we can find that we are, in fact, in relationship. And as I noted in the last issue- relationships are subject to change.

### Leave the shoes at the door

Why do I like to play this game?

It might sound like a little trick of words, an exercise of Imagination- and words and Imagination certainly help. But it is more than that...

In my work with people I have seen how this works- how taking the problem from its place 'inside' and putting it 'outside' changes many things- mostly how it makes room for Hope. Because there are very few of us who can effectively operate on and change our own insides- we take a pill in the hope that it will do its job, we visit a dentist to fill a cavity. We even work out and change our eating habits, in the hope that some internal process will alter and give us the results we want. But in all

those efforts, we are relying on something to happen that is largely outside our control.

But making changes on things outside ourselves, changing our relationships- we have more options there, more room for action that we ourselves can decide on and take. That is a little easier. Not easy, exactly, but definitely easier.

## Therapy Speak

Metaphors are pretty useful in this way of thinking about problems- and it is important that the metaphor be your own.

I went through a couple of ideas before choosing the 'shoes' metaphor, and I think I know why that one worked for me. A few years ago, I was in an accident and suffered an injury to my leg. One of the results of this: no more high heels, platforms, or fashionista shoes for me.

Now- I could (and have) been cranky about my leg, and beaten up on myself for not recovering differently, working harder etc., etc. I could (and have) allowed myself to feel anger and loss about my former footwear freedom. And I could (and have) chosen to ignore what I know and wear shoes that make me suffer.

And then sometime, I choose to wear different shoes.

The point here is that the idea of shoes has meaning and relevance to me, as a metaphor. My choice of the 'shoe' metaphor for models of change is one that I can play with, because shoes are significant in my life.

Might not be the case for you.

In my work with people, I try to learn about what they do and how they spend their time when they are not thinking about or dealing with the problem. This often provides us with a useful metaphor or image to use in the work of redefining problem relationships.

So an athletic person might speak in sport terms; penalties, fouls, training and workouts. A chef might speak in terms of recipes and ingredients. And using these metaphors, we could come up with a framework for understanding and responding to the problem and our relationship with it. A new mother might think in terms of parenting; a teacher might think in terms of education.

What metaphor works for you?