

The experience of connection

The science of love and loving

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So yes, I do grew up in an English pub and it is a very good training to be a therapist. I wish to say though that Rich Simon is the most amazing fibber. I am now where near a competitive tango dancer. I am a beginning tango dancer... It does actually fit because tango has a form but it is also improvised in the moment. So in order to dance tango you have to be very present, very tuned in, very responsive.

I have to remember my first tango lesson and the teacher said to me, now you see tango is a different kind of dance, because in order to dance tango you have to be completely focused, totally present, totally engaged with me, and tuned in, but you probably have no idea what I mean by that. And I said, "I think I might, I think, because you see I'm a therapist" and he said, "No", as if what has that got to do with it. A relationship is also an improvised dance, it's a dance that constantly creates itself, it's a dance that changes and shapes the dancers. So I'm gonna start my talk with showing you just 70 seconds of tango. This is not the dramatic over the top tango, that you see in the movies, this is real tango, this is tango as an intimate conversation. So, what is this? The basis of science - you're all scientists, because you all spend your life observing a dance in your office when you see a couple or family and saying to your self: "What is this? What am I seeing in front of me? What is the pattern?" Well, when I look a this I say: "Maybe this is two people in mutual flow", this is what Csikszentmihalyi calls an optimal experience of energized focus, full involvement, being in the zone. And usually he talks about that in terms of music or art. Or maybe this is resonance, this is the word physicists use for sympathetic vibration between two elements, that suddenly allows them to synchronize signals and to tune into each other and to start to act in harmony, resonating with each others rhythms, reading each others affect and intentions in the moment. This is a neural duet, two people impacting each other on a visceral and emotional level and just as moms and infants do in play.

And by the way, the big news in the neuroscience of relationships is just how much interactions with loved ones really do impact us. Lovers regulate each others physiology, brain activation, emotion. Jim Coan in his research found that if you're securely attached in a threat situation, in this case when you're afraid of being shocked with an electric shock, holding your loved ones hand literally changes how your brain perceives and responds to the threat. And how you experience the pain of the shock. This is a long long way from the old idea that love is just some nebulous mixture of sex and sentimentality that can't be defined. We're putting that under the microscope here. Evidence is that this kind of tuned in resonance, this pattern of communication is necessary for the growth of the right social brain in infants, it literally shapes the brain. Resonance behaviours of mum result in more verbally intelligent, aware, emotionally balanced kids. Kids were then more able to create synchrony in their own relationships with other people. And in adults this kind of tuned in responsiveness is perhaps the essence of falling in love. And I believe, the essence of good sex.

So, maybe then, these images of tuned in coordinated movement simply capture romantic love and as Rich [Simon] said: "it is not so long ago that no self respecting person whoever aspired to be a scientist would ever stand up and use that word in front of colleagues and peers". John Bowlby, the father of attachment theory, did not dare call his theory a theory of love. He called it by the formal term attachment. And in fact what I can share with you, the people that are dancing this tango are happy, secure, long time partners. They are both fully present, fully engaged, creating synchrony.

In emotionally interactions, this delicacy, the delicacy of this web of mutual influence, can be sensed when we note that the detection and processing of the smallest change in the human face occurs within one hundred milliseconds and is mirrored by the observers right hemisphere within three hundred milliseconds. Beneath awareness fleeting emotional cues and rhythms are the music of the dance between intimates. This kind of interaction with its openness, its responsiveness and its fluidity is the ultimate goal of Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy or EFT. This kind of experience creates a felt sense of safety and connection. A safety were we can be fully engaged in a vibrating loop linking nervous systems, engage trustingly with our own experience and our loved ones.

Transcript: www.raspberryhill.eu