

What went
wrong?

SOLUTIONS

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What in the world were they thinking?

David Olsen PhD
Executive Director

If you have been watching the news lately, perhaps your reaction has been like mine. I keep wondering, "Are you kidding? What were you thinking?" The Governor of South Carolina, Mark Sanford, was missing in action. Reports from aides stated that he was hiking on the Appalachian trail. We found out later that he was actually with his mistress in Argentina. All this, after the Governor himself had been a very outspoken critic of former President Clinton and a staunch supporter of family values.

What went wrong? This question is even more relevant in light of the long list of leaders who have gone the same path—President Clinton and his involvement with Monica Lewinsky, former Governor Spitzer and his dalliances with prostitutes, John Edwards' affair that his wife has now described in a book, Senator Larry Craig, and the list of preachers and televangelists who become involved in the very sins they preached against. The list seems to grow daily.

This is nothing new. We can recall in these accounts the Old Testament story of King David who, while seeming to have it all—wealth, marriage, and great power and prestige—still needed more, and so entered into an affair with Bathsheba, whom he spied sunbathing next door.

What is the problem with these situations? What makes people so willing to sabotage their lives and families, and so unconscious about what seems to be driving them to self-destruction? Some would call it a problem of morality, or even "sin." Freud would argue that it is the power of the "id"—a primitive cauldron of desire that needs to be restrained by the super-ego. Freud stated it quite directly, "Society must undertake, as one of its most important educative tasks, to tame and restrict the sexual instinct." Many fundamentalists would say "Amen" to that, and there is certainly some truth to Freud's logic.

But perhaps the human condition is more complicated than that. While much of contemporary psychology focuses on cognitive and behavioral strategies—how you can "think" your way to health or change

your actions—depth psychology asserts the limitations of the will and the conscious mind in creating mental health. The psychoanalytic tradition talks about deep unconscious splits that exist in all of us. Carl Jung talked about the split between the Persona (the person we hope others believe we are) and the Shadow (the dark side; the part of us that we don't want to acknowledge, and sometimes pretend is not there).

Throughout the history of psychology, spirituality and literature, this fundamental split is referenced in a variety of ways. There is the classic image of a good angel on one shoulder and a bad angel on the other, whispering in our ears. When people say, "The Devil made me do it," they are talking about a part of themselves that they do not want to own. When St. Paul describes his struggle about doing the opposite of what he longs to do, he is speaking about a universal human dilemma. And, when politicians (or anyone for that matter) live a double life, they are acting out a powerful intrapsychic split.

We all long to be seen positively. We crave

(continued)

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validation, and sometimes unconsciously want our “Persona” to be validated. The power of an affair, or a double life, is that the other will at least initially provide that validation, while our partners see all of us—Persona and Shadow, the good and the bad. As Maureen Dowd wrote recently in *The New York Times*, “As in all great affairs, Mark Sanford fell in love simultaneously with a woman and himself—with the dashing new version of himself he saw in her molten eyes.”

Long-term marriage offers a powerful cor-

rective to “splitting”—but it takes a lot of courage. Intimacy is not for the faint of heart. Real intimacy, not the stuff of pop culture and the fluff described in self-help magazines, is both risky and potentially redemptive. Allowing your partner to see all of you, without hiding or looking for validation in someone else’s eyes, is where real healing and intimacy are created.

Getting there is far from simple. We don’t start out knowing each other perfectly or knowing ourselves perfectly. Nor are we completely able to see and accept each

other right from the beginning. Choosing a therapist that both understands the complexity of couple dynamics and as well as the deep dilemmas of the human condition is a good start. Embarking on a contemplative spiritual path that helps us move toward honest self-examination is essential. In the end, a marriage based on real and genuine intimacy is not only the “road less traveled,” but well worth the journey. 🧘

Psychotherapy, Integration and Yoga

Oona Edmands, LMSW, EMDR II
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Like the massive bulk of the central king of mountains, the yogi unfazed by transition and change knows bliss.

—Milarepa, 12th century Tibetan saint

A pleasant long-distance romance falls apart when the couple starts spending more time together. A blissful couple that seemed to have no problems starts fighting when one partner gets a job promotion. Reconnecting with a best friend from childhood on Facebook brings the awkward realization of how different you now are. A fairly harmonious family of four begins to have trouble as the oldest enters adolescence. A high-powered lawyer is suddenly racked with anxiety after a layoff and can no longer socialize with friends; it is stressful to lose income, but she also lost a feeling of herself as strong and powerful.

Change is the flow of life. All transitions test our strength, flexibility, and courage. When change affects a relationship, the bond is tested. We must be able to weather the change, talk with each other about the anxiety that might be coming up, and be able to negotiate new roles for ourselves and tolerate them in others. What happens when little Johnny is at the age where he wants to get a part-time job? Can we tolerate this? What happens when our fantasy long-distance relationship shows up at our door, warts and all? The dance of the relationship must be able to adjust to new tempos and melodies. If we have gotten too attached to the safety of how it was, we will inevitably experience conflict at these times. These are often the times when people will seek psychotherapy.

What makes transitions difficult is often the way we have split our Persona and our Shadow. Online relationships are particularly vulnerable to this, as our best selves are put forward, and the more unresolved aspects of ourselves are hidden away. In established family relationships, it is not always so obvious. The person who was the breadwinner in the family may have understandable anxiety during a layoff. But a deeper pattern was also at work. They may have been the overfunctioner in the family and do not know how to handle it when other people are sud-

denly taking care of them. Psychotherapy provides a way to dialogue about these difficult situations. When it seems as if we are no longer the people we want to be, and our partners are no longer seeing us the way we want to be seen, couple, family or individual therapy is often very helpful.

It may surprise you to know that psychotherapy can be considered a type of yoga. The word “yoga” has many translations. One meaning is “to unite.” Physical yoga postures involve holding poses for a long period of time, as we practice deep breathing and meditative concentration. Through this, we attempt to unite our body and mind and experience a transcendent state of consciousness.

A therapist’s job is like that of a yoga teacher, but they do it in a very subtle way. By attuning themselves to the client, they attempt to help integrate, or unite, Persona and Shadow. A person may come to a therapist’s office complaining of inability to sleep, symptoms of anxiety and a pervasive sense of low self-esteem. They may be struggling with a change in a relationship; for example, the inability to accept that a partner has left them. The therapist might say, “It sounds like you’re really devastated by their leaving.” This statement, while it may sound obvious, is meant to facilitate the experience of “yoga.” The client might hear it and realize how true it is. This might help bring forth tears that have been bottled up for the past several weeks. Though it is a painful realization, the process of uniting with, or attuning to yourself—how you really feel and who you really are—brings forth tremendous healing. You are “uniting” with a part of yourself you didn’t want to feel, your Shadow.

Though it is certainly not always this simple, the goal of psychotherapy is to help you unite with yourself, to reduce the splitting of Persona and Shadow. This union within the self facilitates easier and more effective responses to changes in life—such as the beginning and end of relationships, job or family changes—that tend to throw most of us for a loop. As you become more integrated within yourself, you can respond to changes with equanimity, intelligence and courage. You may even be a guide for others to do the same. 🧘

Personas Online: What's missing on Facebook

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Training Director

Facebook's tagline says that it "helps you connect and share with people in your life." But are these online, social networking sites helping or hurting your relationships?

These are exciting times we live in. We can be in contact with anyone, anywhere, at any time, if we so choose. We can discover that people we went to high school with are married with children, where they work, and whether or not they are happy. We don't even have to ask anyone, or run into them at the supermarket.

But face-to face interaction cannot be replaced. Dan Siegel's more recent brain research sites many important things that happen to us neurochemically when we interact with other human beings. Intuitively, we feel validated through eye contact and the nodding of a head; this is because our nervous system is getting signals necessary to regulate itself. Siegel talks about the power of the mother's gaze when a child is in infancy. It is something the in-

fant deeply needs in order to develop into a healthy child. The infant feels held and mirrored.

Yes... the Internet can be fun and entertaining. But we cannot forget about metacommunication, the cadence, sequence and nonverbal cues that happen when we're in-person. Can you read that in your online interactions? Think about how many times you have composed and recomposed an email to portray the perfect impression instead of what you really meant. We are portraying a perfect Persona and eliminating all traces of our Shadow, the part of ourselves we feel is unacceptable. This cannot happen when we are face-to-face with another person. In person, we can get a clearer picture of the actual anxiety that exists in the relationship. The Internet could be a virtual "cure all" for social anxiety. Some people live their lives online, communicating only in ways they feel comfortable. But are they really overcoming their anxiety or is the Internet just a way to hide it?

Anxiety can actually be helpful in relationships. It can propel us to do things that

are good and exciting. Anxiety does not need to be something feared, if it is dealt with appropriately. Good anxiety helps us to be motivated to put our feet on the floor in the morning and do what we despise but have to do. If the anxiety that comes from being in a close personal situation with another person didn't exist, there would be nothing to learn.

The downside of the Internet is that we don't need to face each other, and see what is really happening in our encounters. The most intimate feelings can be shared over the airways as if it means something. But if we really had the courage to develop real intimate relationships, we would feel the anxiety and do something with it--something creative, something fun, something with interest, something daring or courageous. Our nonverbal interactions could become the information superhighway. This could provide the glue and foundation for us to really deeply experience each other and develop intimacy that is sacred. 🙏

Doing Likewise

—An invitation to become an *Active Samaritan*

Andrew Chestnut, LMSW, MBA
Staff Psychotherapist

Our Center takes its name from Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, recorded in the gospel according to Luke. A man is beaten and robbed on the road. A priest and a Levite see this and pass by, but one traveler from Samaria stops to help. This is a familiar story, but it is told as the answer to a question. A lawyer asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answers by asking the lawyer to cite the law, and he does so: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus replies, "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live." The lawyer isn't satisfied, and looks for a loophole. He asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus answers him with the story of the Good Samaritan. At the end of the story, Jesus asks the lawyer, referring to the priest, the Levite and the Samaritan: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The lawyer replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

The *Active Samaritan* program at the Samaritan Counseling Center helps to provide counseling services to those who would be oth-

erwise unable to receive it, through donations provided by area businesses, individuals and churches. Given job loss and economic stress, this year we have already spent three times more than we have received in donations. We continue to have more intakes than ever, while more and more of our clients are finding it difficult to pay for clinical services, and many are out of work. In some of the counties that we serve, we are completely out of *Active Samaritan* money, and are trying to find new sources of charitable donations to help our clients who are in need of clinical services.

At our Center, we are looking to develop our *Active Samaritan* program and engage with the community. All of us have neighbors for whom we are commanded, like Jesus said to the lawyer, to "do likewise." We would like to invite you to become an *Active Samaritan*. We need help with marketing, advocacy and fundraising. Please contact us if you would like to be involved in any of these areas.

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