

MEDIATION

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The Art of Mediation is one of the most powerful techniques we have developed in Radical Psychiatry and an important contribution to the general field of “conflict resolution.” It became clear to us that there were few, if any, models of cooperative behavior to guide people when conflicts arose in their families and love life, on the job or in the community. We saw an absence in the field of psychology of an analysis of power and competition that would aid people in their struggle for equal, happy relationships.

In the coming decade of the '80s it is clear that the material conditions necessary for life (jobs, housing, food, natural resources) will become more scarce and more expensive, and that consequently the pressures on the social units that sustain our emotional life — the family, lovers, friends, and workmates — will become more intense. Child-abuse, wife-beating, divorce, loneliness and madness are on the increase. More people wander about alienated and disconnected from either families or defined community.

Where are people learning to be cooperative? How do people learn to communicate clearly to others what they think and feel, without being judgmental and hurting others' feelings? How do people resolve their conflicts without violence or giving away huge quantities of money to lawyers? Obviously, Mediations won't erase all these serious social problems, but learning how to work cooperatively on our disagreements is essential if we are to come together to find solutions.

Over the years, most of the Mediations we have done have been between two people, usually a man and a woman in a relationship. We have also done many Mediations for gay and lesbian couples, children and their parents, friends and co-workers. We have Mediated union staffs, health clinics, food coops, political organizations, newspaper staffs, restaurants, artists' groups, collective households and people who own property together in both the city and the country. We want to share what we have learned in the hope that it will be helpful and that in the future these techniques will continue to be improved and developed.

THEORY

Causes of Conflict

Our approach to Mediations comes out of Radical Psychiatry theory. “Establishment” therapists call their work that resembles Mediations, Counseling or Family Therapy. We picked the name “Mediation” because it reflects our belief that people who are having trouble have real, concrete differences: they are thinking differently, feeling differently, wanting different things. It is our belief that when these differences are identified and clearly stated, without judgment or cruelty, they can be negotiated. It is important to agree that a “creative solution” might include dissolving the relationship, understanding why it didn't work and leaving with a minimum of bad feeling.

Who Can Be Mediated

Since Radical Psychiatrists believe that conflict emerges when differences are (objectively) real and possible to identify (not “just in your head”), we insist that these objective differences be discussed, negotiated, and, if possible, changed. Some people and organizations, however, defy the intention and spirit

of a Mediation: people who have more than their fair share of power and resources and who refuse to give them up. We won't do Mediations between Standard Oil and "their" workers, or between wardens and prisoners. It is our position that a Mediation requires an assumption of equal rights and a desire to equalize power so that everyone can pursue their needs equally. We are only interested in negotiating between people who have a basic desire to work and live cooperatively, or who, in our terms, have or would like to have a mutual Cooperative Contract.

Cooperation Contract

In her book, *Solving Problems Together*, Hogie Wyckoff defined cooperation as:

...working together for everyone's good, including one's own. The Radical Psychiatry rules of cooperation are based on the following assumptions: there are sufficient resources to share, the individuals involved have equal rights; no one will lie or keep secrets; no one will misuse or abuse power through power plays; and no one will Rescue - that is, no one will do more than an equal share of the work, or anything she does not want to do.

To summarize, a Cooperative Contract is an agreement to work on:

1. no lies or secrets (distorted or withheld information),
2. no Rescues (doing more than your share, or something you don't want to do), and
3. no power plays (any action intended to get people to do things against their will). Rescues will be explained in greater detail later in this article (see also Chapter 7).

Who Can Mediate

Being a good Mediator takes skill. It takes a person committed to listening to both sides of an argument with an open mind and compassion. This capacity is manifested in being able to see why people act the way they do rather than judging them for it, and in looking for solutions to problems rather than finding who is to blame for them. Mediating takes power and conviction. A good Mediator is someone who is not afraid to offer her opinion, to say the unsayable and to evoke the best from people, to be both tough and tender.

SETTING UP THE MEDIATION

The ultimate success of a Mediation depends, to a large extent, on its having been set up adequately, most often over the phone. There are a number of questions to ask and issues to negotiate before homework is assigned and a time and a date agreed upon.

Crucial Questions to Ask:

I. Does everyone want to have a Mediation?

It is most important to avoid entering into a Mediation with people who are not really interested in mediating their difficulties. It is not uncommon for a wife to drag a reluctant husband to a Mediation with

threats of leaving him, or for a young person to come with parents because they feel they have no choice. In a large group there are often one or two people who are shy about talking about their problems in a large group or in front of a stranger.

Often people are worn out and feeling hopeless because of all the fighting and struggle that has gone on before the Mediator is called. Many people have had bad experiences with ineffectual counseling. Some of the complaints we most commonly hear are that other therapists allow people to vent angry feelings without restraint and care. They leave these kinds of sessions feeling great pain and hurt but without any new ideas or insights.

Unless everyone concerned wants a Mediation there is really no point. It won't work. We ask anyone who is unsure about it to call and speak to the Mediator separately. It is best if the reluctant party calls on their own volition, and is not dragged to the phone. We do not accept a third person's word. We do not ourselves call people or initiate contact. Most of the time a careful explanation of the general form of a Mediation and the homework assignment will allay people's fears. Sometimes just hearing the "warm and reasonable" voice of the Mediator over the phone makes a difference.

It is important that the Mediator ask, with real interest, what people are afraid of and be ready to validate the reasonableness of the fear, and to speak to it. For example, a woman might be afraid that a male Mediator would not be aware of sexism — his own and her husband's; she might doubt his ability to be impartial. If her fears can't be worked out, another Mediator should be found. Use your good judgment. The admonition here is to be extremely careful. You must be prepared to refuse to do a Mediation, no matter how badly someone may want it, if the conditions are not right. You'll have one more chance to check things out at the beginning of the Mediation itself.

2. Will everyone concerned be there ?

Often a Mediation will be requested when one crucial person will be missing (out of town or working). We once consented to do a Mediation for a large (14 people) collective household when one of the people had to be out of town. Finding a time convenient for all those people, including the Mediators (two of us went) was extremely difficult. After hesitating, we were assured that the missing person had promised to abide by any and all decisions made by the group in her absence, and that everyone knew her views backward and forward, well enough to represent them during the Mediation. It was an emergency: they were facing eviction. The Mediation was long and difficult. Finally, hard-won agreements were worked out. We left exhausted and victorious. We heard several days later that the missing woman had returned and been extremely upset when she heard what had been worked out. She was completely puzzled about how it had happened, and she refused to go along. Everyone had worked very hard for nothing.

3. Will everyone accept the Mediator as the ultimate authority during the Mediation?

This question is especially important in situations where the Mediator and the people don't know each other and people don't have any experience with Mediations or know how they work. It is also important in large groups where specific issues are hotly disputed: e.g., one person has been asked to move out; people are fighting over ownership or money. The question of authority is raised in order to establish agreement that — for the purposes of the Mediation and only during its duration — people will defer to the Mediator as the ultimate authority in any matters being disputed, including procedure. For instance, someone might

disagree on how to respond to a held resentment, or might rebel at the seemingly endless process of “clearing the boards.”

The Mediator needs a mandate (agreement) from the group to proceed according to her judgment, especially when things get tough (strong disagreements). This does not mean the Mediator is in fact the ultimate authority. Any participant can agree to disagree or leave the Mediation, thereby escaping the Mediator's opinion and the opinion of the group. Making this commitment ahead of time is helpful in preventing people from going into the Mediation with private, unspoken reservations which render the Mediation useless.

Homework

During the conversation setting up the Mediation, we explain to people that we want them to do some homework. We explain that this work will facilitate the process, helping it to go faster and reach a satisfactory conclusion. We want people to have time to give some calm thought to the matter at hand and walk in to the Mediation with thoughts and feelings as organized as possible.

A Mediation depends for its success on the rational, objective, linear part of people's faculties. We want to avoid, as much as possible, an emotional scene, with everyone hurt, angry, crying and thrashing around. Mediation is not an emotional release technique, but rather a process for thinking about and solving problems in a new, creative way. People who are fighting can usually release their emotions, and often do, without paying for it or having others watch. What people want are some new solutions. Be sure to ask people to prepare their homework on their own, without consulting others. We want each person's independent, individual thoughts and feelings.

I. Contracts

We ask people to prepare a Contract. A Contract is a clear, definite set of goals to be accomplished within the time of the Mediation. Examples of familiar contracts are: “improve communication,” “learn to give and take criticism without fighting,” “improve sex,” “dissolve the relationship and stay friends,” “stop fighting,” “make clear agreements about the division of work,” “change economic arrangements,” and so on.

2. Held Feelings

We ask people to write down their Held Feelings: a statement of an event that made them angry or hurt their feelings and which has not been expressed. We explain that we want to clear the air, learn what is going on, and teach them how to exchange criticism in a way that is helpful.

People are asked to use this very simple, fill-in sentence: “When you (A_____), I feel (B_____).” We want two pieces of information: (A) an action (a verb), and (B) a feeling (an adjective). “When you come to a meeting late, I feel angry and hurt.” “When you raise your voice, I feel frightened and angry.” We ask people not to get fancy, just to record single events and use simple words to describe what feelings were evoked. Simple words for negative feelings are: angry, sad, hurt, frightened, ashamed, guilty. People must be encouraged to record anything that made them feel badly, no matter how silly and trivial it seems. People often ask if they should write down something they have already said before; the answer is: yes, if they still have strong feelings about it.

The people who enjoy this assignment are those who welcome an opportunity to get all of the stuff in their head and hearts out on paper in an organized fashion. Often the people who have trouble with this assignment are those who discount their feelings and find it hard to remember the specific actions or events that made them feel badly. Men most often fall into this second group. More about that later.

3. Demands

We ask people to prepare their demands, things they cannot continue in the relationship without; for example: “I cannot stay in this relationship if you continue to have other lovers,” or “I cannot stay in this relationship unless I am allowed to have other lovers,” or “I want a baby,” or “I don’t want a baby.” “I want to move to the country,” or “I don’t want to live with other people, collectively or any other way.” People don’t always have bottom-line, non-negotiable demands, but when they do, it is important to know them. This information will be useful in arriving at a Contract for the Mediation.

4. Paranoias and Rescues

Depending on how well-acquainted the person is with our work and these techniques, and how difficult it might be to explain Paranoid Fantasies (a current fear about what another is feeling and doing that is a secret, or at least, not obvious) and Rescues (things you have done or said that you don’t want to do or say), we might ask them to include them in their homework. Most of the time it is too difficult to explain all of this material over the phone and all that is asked for is Held Feelings, Contracts and Demands.

Payment

Finally, it is important that the payment or barter for the work of the Mediation is clear before the Mediation is convened. If the Mediator’s hourly wage is twenty-five dollars, and people want to offer goods or services instead, the exchange should be crystal clear to all so that it doesn’t become an issue during or after the Mediation. Being a Mediator is hard work, including recovery timer later. It is important that the Mediator be recompensed in some satisfying way.

Advocates or “Outsiders”

Lately some of us have been experimenting with the use of advocates, that is, a friend who is outside the fight, whose function it is to be close at hand, to nurture and be supportive, and to make sure her charge is not feeling bad about herself and losing her capacity to think and proceed rationally. This advocate can perform important functions after the Mediation; for instance, he can be an objective memory bank about what went on when fully-active participants have forgotten. On occasion, if issues are to be dealt with about which the Mediator is not expert — such as race, gay or age issues — a consultant should be invited to sit in. In addition, the Mediator may want to bring along someone she is training or, if the group is large and issues complicated, she may need an assistant. All of these people will need to be discussed with all concerned, and permission gotten for their presence. In general, “the more the merrier,” up to eight people (or until the room is too crowded and uncomfortable), as long as it is understood that all the secondary people must subsume their needs to the needs of the people being mediated.

“Gossip”

We have discovered, after years of practice, that gossip, or information on the “grapevine” about people in a fight, can be extremely useful. A word of caution, however: all such information must be taken with a grain of salt, for it is probably inaccurate, one-sided and sometimes just down-right malicious. Despite that, it can alert a Mediator to a problem that needs to be considered. Different perspectives from different people, while not necessarily correct in themselves, when taken together give a picture of what's going on which could be helpful in the course of the Mediation. The correct use of information (gossip) depends on the premier quality of a good Mediator: someone who knows her own biases and keeps them out of the way through a process of careful sorting.

THE MEDIATION

Warm-Up

It is important that a Mediation take place in a comfortable, pleasant space which gives people the confidence that they can speak their minds without being overheard, and that they will not be intruded upon by uninvited outsiders. Seating is important. The distance between people engaging in the Mediation and between them and the Mediator should be neither too far nor too close for comfort. It is important that the Mediator does not sit closer to one of the parties than to the others in the Mediation so that she may keep an equidistant perspective on the situation. People's advocates should sit within touching range of the person they are advocating for. In short, the seating arrangements need to be thoughtfully considered in order to make everyone feel protected, safe, and trusting. The first few exchanges in the Mediation should be spent relaxing and getting comfortable. There is no reason why there should not be a few minutes of idle get-acquainted chatter to precede the work. Some of us may serve tea or coffee.

Checking In

As soon as everyone is physically comfortable the Mediator should ask how each person is feeling, and that question should be answered by each person in turn with special attention to people who are scared or especially uncomfortable. If any negative emotions are expressed, time should be taken to find out what exactly they are and what, if anything, can be done to alleviate them.

Many times these feelings have to do with worry about the Mediator's prejudices and biases. This is a good opportunity to explain how we use the idea of Paranoid Fantasies, how they are presented and how they are responded to. For instance: “I'm afraid that you will take my wife's side in the Mediation because you are a woman and a feminist” — a perfectly reasonable fear (or Paranoia). The grain of truth must always be found and stated by the person receiving the fear. “Yes, it is true that because I am a woman and a feminist, I have a keen eye for women's problems, and sometimes my feelings can get intense. However, I am well aware of how women can add to and accept their lot. My work here is to be objective. I understand that neither you nor your wife will learn anything here if I am unfair. I also trust your critical judgment. If you think I am being unfair, please stop me. I promise to be open to your criticism.”

It is not uncommon for us to know one of the people in a couple we are mediating — for example, to have that person in a problem-solving group we lead. This can lead to a fear that the Mediator will be prejudiced in favor of the person she knows best. We reassure people by explaining that our work is to be on top of such prejudices (validate what they are, if they exist), to protect both of them from abuse of any kind, and to accept and welcome criticism if we should make a mistake. That usually reassures people. It also helps to tell people that a fight is almost never the fault of only one person.

Once a frightened eight-year-old came for a Mediation with his father. He carried a Snoopy blanket, and when the Mediation began he turned his back to the adults in the room and stuck fingers in both his ears. The Mediator made the decision to give it a try and proceeded to ask the father some questions without disturbing the little boy. When the child heard the Mediator tell his father that taking away the boy's allowance when he didn't clean his room wasn't fair, he unplugged his ears and joined the Mediation.

Other common fears before a Mediation starts are: "I'm afraid I'll start to cry and I won't be able to stop." Or, "I'm afraid I won't be able to make clear what I really feel, and I'll realize that only after I leave." Or, "I'm afraid I'll hurt his feelings." People anticipate that the Mediation will be real "heavy" and emotional. They are legitimately terrified to open themselves up, anticipating harsh criticism, blame and shame, or that something awful will be revealed. Sometimes this is due to the general reputation of confrontive encounter groups, attack-therapy approaches. Often it is because there are absolutely no models for good criticism, and people simply associate telling the truth with hurting others.

We reassure people, validating whatever fears we can, but explaining that we hope we will not only help them solve this current conflict they're in, but also teach them a method of problem-solving for the future; that we are interested in loving confrontation, not attacks; that if anyone is overcome with emotion, crying or rage, we will stop to give people time to cry, calm down, dry their eyes, and get their thoughts back together.

Sometimes telling people the general agenda for the Mediation, especially that it will end with "strokes" (verbal compliments) is reassuring. We are not asking people to let it all hang out without helping them put it back together before they leave.

Contracts

Having gone through the preliminaries of making people comfortable and taking care of their fears, it is time to begin the "formal" part of the Mediation. Ask people to get their written notes and give you their contracts. For example:

Julie and Harry are a young working class couple with a year-and-a-half old son. She is in a problem-solving group with the Mediator and has moved out of their small house to her sister's apartment with their son. Harry wants as his contract to find out what it will take on his part to make this marriage work (he adds it is the number one thing in his life), and to convince Julie to move back into their house. Julie says she wants to find out if it is possible to get the energy needed to save the marriage, and that she would like to continue living apart, and seeing Harry, slowly, while separated.

Earlier when they had been asked for their fears, Julie had said she was afraid to hurt Harry's feelings, afraid that she would be "too nice." Harry had said he felt afraid it wasn't going to work, that Julie was going to ask him to give up too much. The Mediator at this point needs to determine whether what people want from the Mediation is possible. Are their objectives mutually exclusive? Can the Mediator "deliver," be helpful?

On rare occasions, at this juncture, a Mediation can be called off. If after asking questions, you discover that no one is willing to compromise, it is useless to continue. In the case of Julie and Harry, if Harry had been unwilling to discuss an interim arrangement with his wife, seeing her while she lived with her sister, or if Julie had made up her mind never to live with Harry again, then it would have been our opinion that it was useless to go on without a change in the contract.

In almost all cases, even when the Mediator suspects that a solution will not be possible, either because of accumulated experience or an intuitive flash, it is better to let the Mediation continue. People need to be given the opportunity to go through the experience of exchanging Held Feelings before they are ready to give up on a relationship they feel deeply about. It is always possible, of course, that these people will be the exception to both your experience and your intuition.

Clearing the Boards

The exchange of Held Feelings, Paranoias and Rescues is the real “meat” of the Mediation. Their full expression not only clears out Held Feelings and opinions but also provides the perceptive observer with information which slowly forms a composite picture of what the conflict is all about. This process is fascinating. It is as if a three-dimensional hologram, a plastic representation of the relationship, slowly grows in the mind of the Mediator until she feels that she understands the situation well enough to be able to make helpful recommendations. The uniqueness of each person and each situation, no matter how many people and stories one has encountered, never ceases to be impressive.

Clearly this process only works if people are willing to be completely truthful and to reveal all of the feelings relevant to the situation. When people express their innermost and heartfelt emotions and the events which evoke those emotions, they will in fact provide the observers, the participants and each other with a concise and moving picture of the conflict. We use these specific, ritualistic forms for the expression of feelings and thoughts to insure that the exchange will be clean and safe.

In addition to clearing out and supplying information, the exchange of Held Feelings, Paranoias and Rescues is in itself a useful lesson in “Emotional Literacy” (see Chapter Eight). The sophisticated awareness of one's own feelings and the feelings of others, and the knowledge of how most constructively and nurturingly to deal with them, is being “emotionally literate.” True, one Mediation cannot teach all that needs to be known about emotional literacy, but it can be an important first step. A major objective of a good Mediation will be accomplished if people learn skills that will make the service of a Mediator be needed less frequently, if at all.

I. Held Feelings

A Held Feeling expresses what a person felt when she was exposed to another's behavior, and did not say. The more specifically described, the better. Harry: “Last Friday evening when you stopped the project we were doing together to go take care of Tim, I felt frustrated and angry.” Julie: “When you come home from work and read the paper right away, I feel neglected, disappointed and sad.” The person expressing the Held Feeling has to describe with clarity what the other did (specific times it happened are ideal) and how they felt as a result.

The person receiving the Held Feelings must work hard not to be defensive. The recipient needs to acknowledge (write it down, nod, or say: “I hear you”) that when he behaved in such-and-such a way, the other person had some feelings that were connected with that behavior. Harry wants to defend himself against Julie's feelings. He's exhausted after a full day's work; he needs some time to read the paper and get himself together — all perfectly understandable, but it misses the point: when he does it, Julie's feelings are hurt. The work of the Mediator is to urge the person hearing a feeling to relax and listen to how the other is feeling, even if he interprets his own behavior differently or feels that his behavior is not fairly portrayed. The impulse to correct another's perception often is a major problem in itself. What others feel is not up for debate.

With respect to Held Feelings, there are some things that happen fairly routinely. For example, it is a common occurrence for women to arrive at a Mediation with more Held Feelings prepared than men. That's probably because of the way that most men are oppressed (some notable exceptions are men who are artists or in other fields that need men to feel). Men are not given as much permission to feel, nor to pay attention to all the details of what makes them feel bad. You can't have a population of deeply-feeling men. Who would dig the ditches, work on the assembly lines, and push papers around in artificially-lighted rooms all day? Men discount themselves, and then they forget they have done so, while women have more permission to be sensitive and to take better care of their feelings. Women, in their roles as mothers and nurturers of men, *have* to feel.

One of the exciting things we have noticed over the years is that, as a result of the Women's Movement, men's consciousness is changing. There is a whole new group of men who take the problem seriously and are beginning to think and feel differently.

Sometimes when a woman arrives with more feelings to give than her man, her material will inspire him. He will be reminded of events and feelings he had forgotten. Get him to take notes as they occur to him.

“Pigging”: Some people have to be painstakingly taught how to exchange feelings properly, without angry name-calling. “When you act like a slob, I feel angry.” (“Slob” is not a clearly described action; it's an opinion.) “When you left the dirty dishes in the sink, you were being a dirty slob.” No good: that's not a feeling, that's still just an opinion, a value judgment (“People who don't wash their dishes are dirty slobs”). Someone else might think that not washing their dishes was a reasonable, ecological thing to do; or she might just not care. The Mediator's job is to prevent people from talking to each other in such a mean way, a way we call “Pigging” (See Chapter 5 and Appendix A). Pigging is defined by us as name-calling, using metaphors, overstatements or “you are _____” statements. These styles of speech lead to the use of judgments and evoke hurt and angry responses (otherwise known as a fight).

This part of the Mediation may take a long time and needs a lot of patience and thoroughness. To help protect people we have developed some additional tricks:

Asking: Before every Held Feeling, Paranoia or Rescue expressed, it is important that the recipient be ready and receptive. Accordingly, we make sure that the question is asked, “I have a Held Feeling; do you want to hear it?” If the answer is “yes,” things proceed. During a Mediation it is unlikely that the answer would be “no;” people have made the appointment to do just that — exchange feelings. However in “normal” life sometimes the answer to the question should be “no;” if people are too tired, distracted, or ill to hear and respond thoughtfully to a Held Feeling, it should not be given.

Taking Turns: People take turns exchanging their Held Feelings, etc.: first one, then the other. In a large group, make sure no one speaks a second time until everyone has spoken once, and so on. The theory behind alternating is that it is a way to keep any one person from getting overloaded. In a group, often more than one person feels the same thing about a specific person. The Mediator must protect that person from getting the same criticism over and over again, each on the heels of the one that came just before it. Ask people not to repeat a feeling if it has already been given (unless they just must in order to feel better; that can happen sometimes if people feel very, very strongly about an issue). Also, ask people who want to give a Held Feeling to someone who has just received one, to wait or to give one to somebody else if they can, while the receiver has time to rest.

New Subject: Make sure that one Held Feeling is not answered with another. For example, “When you left the dishes in the sink, I felt angry,” might be followed by “When you nagged me to wash the dishes right away, I was angry (too).” While the second resentment might be legitimate, its timing is probably wrong. It sounds suspiciously defensive and seems to be a discount of the previous resentment. Mediators

have to be vigilant; people are smart enough to figure out how to argue and fight no matter how careful the technique.

2. Paranoid Fantasies

When a person has a Paranoid Fantasy, they are suspicious and fearful that someone is consciously thinking or doing something that is hidden, or at least not overtly stated. We have discovered that the less people know each other, the more fantastic or outrageous-seeming are their Paranoias. A Mediator must be sure that Paranoias are expressed and validated. They are often found immediately behind a Held Feeling.

In fact, it takes people some time to distinguish the difference between a Held Feeling and a Paranoia. For example, Julie says, “When you were late for dinner, I felt you were angry at me and that was the way you were taking it out on me.” “I felt you were angry at me, etc.,” is not a feeling; it is a perfectly reasonable Paranoia, or intuition, about why Harry was late to dinner. But given in this fashion, it will rightfully make Harry angry. It is a speculation about why Harry has done something without asking him. Properly done, this complaint has two parts: 1) a Held Feeling — “When you were late for dinner, I felt hurt and angry” — and, 2) a Paranoia — “I am paranoid that when you were late to dinner it was because you were angry and trying to take it out on me. Is there some kernel of truth in that?” Harry answers, “Yes, it's true; I left the warehouse later than I usually do because I was angry at you and didn't want to come home. It is not true that I planned to be late for dinner; I didn't think about it.”

Remember that we consider Paranoia to be heightened awareness that always has at least a small grain of truth (see Chapter 8). To invalidate Paranoias is to produce emotional damage, and if done consistently and systematically it will cause madness. Using the process of finding a kernel of truth both validates people's intuitions or perceptions, and at the same time takes away the distortion and brings the Paranoia into line with reality. For example, Harry has a Paranoia for Julie (after telling her he is angry that she almost never initiates sex): “I have a Paranoia that you don't like sex.” Julie replies, “It's true; I used to enjoy sex with you when we were first together. Now there is no romance.” When pushed, Julie makes it clearer what “romance” means (watch out for such catch-all words; they don't communicate much information). “I mean there is no foreplay; you don't say sweet, sexy things to me; and you don't keep yourself looking as nice as you used to.”

If the recipient of a Paranoia is trying to be cooperative, she is under obligation to find the “grain of truth,” whether large or small. Whatever the answer, the validation has to satisfy the person suffering the Paranoia, or more validation needs to be sought. It is not permissible to discount a Paranoia in its entirety.

3. Rescues

Rescue describes the times a person does something she doesn't want to do, or does more than her share of obligations (see Chapter 7). (Obviously, people must sometimes do things they don't want to do — like work, or empty the garbage. It is important in a cooperative relationship that no one is doing more than their just share.) To Rescue is to disregard one's own feelings and rights, thereby generating feelings of resentment not only in the Rescuer but also in the person being Rescued (we call that person the Victim). People who are treated as Victims get angry at being treated as if they can't take care of themselves. For

example, Julie says, “I Rescued you on the camping trip when I didn’t ask to sleep separately on the nights I really wanted to be alone. I was afraid I would hurt your feelings.” Expressing the Rescues that have been committed not only is an acknowledgment of an error, but a revelation about the possible source of heretofore unexplained bad feelings. (Julie felt grumpy during the trip and didn’t know exactly why; certainly Harry didn’t know why.) It places some of the responsibility for bad feelings on the Rescuer rather than solely on the Victim. Harry might have felt bad if Julie had said she wanted to sleep alone, but he can’t be asked to take the responsibility for the fact she didn’t even mention it. Stated Rescues do not require a response except for an acknowledgment that they have been heard and understood.

4. Flexibility

Even though we have established narrow guidelines for the expression of Held Feelings, Paranoias and Rescues, as well as for the general form and order of a Mediation, it may become more efficient for the Mediator to pass over or rearrange some of these guidelines. Whenever it develops, however, that a speed-up or change allows discounts or judgmental statements to fly, then it will be necessary to retreat to the painstaking, step-by-step, ritualized approach — especially during the exchange of feelings.

The more experienced a Mediator is, the more flexible and experimental she can afford to be. For example, a Mediator could allow more than one Held Feeling to be given at a time (Harry gives Julie all his Held Feelings and when he is finished, Julie gives all of hers), if people understand the process and seem to be feeling calm enough to hear all of that material at one time. Some of us begin a Mediation by asking a few questions about people’s ages, jobs, number of children, years married, whatever. Some of us insist on a ten to fifteen minute break in the middle of a Mediation. Some of us never work alone in a group larger than four. Some of us never work alone. Radical Psychiatry Mediation is a new art, and it needs skilled and concerned people to experiment, make changes and improve its power. A word of caution: All of these techniques have come out of many years of collective practice and criticism. It is important that people add to and improve these forms with the feedback and help of others, not in isolated practice.

Analysis and New Agreements (otherwise known as “The Moment of Truth”)

All the information is out. The Mediator has taken careful notes, asked many questions, and carefully observed the interactions between people (both verbal and non-verbal). She has not yet suggested any solutions. There are several questions a Mediator has been trying to answer in her mind and the process has unfolded up to this point:

- ◆ What are the objective, concrete inequalities between these people (power, money, responsibility, skill)?
- ◆ What repeated behavior could be corrected that would help them solve problems and improve their lives? (Examples: stop shouting; give Held Feelings sooner; have weekly date for fun; have weekly date to work out schedules and give Held Feelings; share initiation of sex 50/50.)

With a clear understanding that any analysis has zero probability of being completely correct and that any analysis will have to be accepted by both or all the participants to have any effectiveness, the Mediator can now give her analysis and suggest some new agreements. One more teaching technique: before speaking, the Mediator could ask the participants to say what they think the major problems are. This provides an opportunity for people to take their own power and say what may already be obvious to them, as well as giving the Mediator more time and information to figure out what is going on.

Mediator: "I think that both of you have been in a long-standing power struggle in which you, Harry, have been wanting Julie to take care of your emotional and sexual needs, as well as your new baby, and Julie, you have wanted Harry to spend more time around the house helping with the baby and chores, generally hanging out and being loving and supportive in a non-sexual way. You have also depended on him to support the family financially. Both of you are constantly angry with each other and expressing it with power plays and regular fights. You have done some damaging things to each other, especially you, Harry, when you hit Julie, and Julie when you ran away with the baby to your sister's without telling Harry where you were and what you were doing. I am not sure it can be fixed. The division of labor has been too unequal for too long; most of your interactions are fights; you almost never have any fun together; Julie seldom enjoys sex and wants to live separately. I have a couple of suggestions of what you might try before any final decisions are made. Does what I have said so far make sense? Would you like to hear my ideas?"

It is difficult to reproduce exactly and explain this crucial moment in the Mediation. The point is, not to be shy with an opinion. If people knew what was going on or what to do about it, they wouldn't come for the Mediation. If people agree with what you have said so far and want to hear more, continue.

Mediator, continuing: "It is our experience that a complete separation of at least six weeks is often helpful. It gives people time to rest, heal their wounds, and re-evaluate their feelings about the relationship. It also could be a time for you to do some work on yourselves — join a problem-solving group, join a men's group, make new friends to break your isolation, look for a job, Julie; etc. You could also try living together again under some extremely strict rules of behavior so that power plays and fights are avoided. It is my opinion that neither of you can take more hurt and abuse. What do you think about these suggestions?"

There are a number of possible alternatives for Harry and Julie to decide upon: they both may want to separate; they both may want to stay together; or one of them want to separate and the other to stay together. If Julie wants to move and Harry would like them to stay together, Harry will have to give in. There is no way to force someone to stay in a cooperative relationship against her will. The Mediator needs gently to make that clear to Harry. There is no way for him to be happy with a companion-lover who is with him against her will. The Mediator can also be confident that the separation will catapult Harry into positive life changes he cannot imagine now. He should be told that. If Harry and Julie want to separate, all the details must be carefully negotiated and agreements made. (It helps to ask all parties to write down these agreements as they are reached.) How long is the separation? How thorough? Will it be complete: no phone calls, no letters, no third hand information from mutual friends, no sharing of familiar haunts (restaurants, bars, meetings, parties)? How will work be divided: childcare, bill-paying, other obligations? If there is an emergency, what is the procedure? (Often we suggest that they pick a mutually trusted third party to carry messages that cannot wait and concern business only. If children are involved, close friends and relatives can be agreed upon to help transport kids who are too young to make arrangements for themselves.)

If they decide to stay together, how will they deal with arguments? What is each one of them going to work on independently to improve their relationship? Harry should be urged to promise never, under any circumstances, to strike Julie or in any way take advantage of his superior physical strength.

This cannot be emphasized enough. It is ridiculous to carefully negotiate a cooperative contract which depends on equality if one person insists on exercising an advantage that the other can never match and that will be the final arbitrator in a disagreement. Harry could decide that all this cooperation stuff had worn him out, that a punch in the mouth is more effective. Julie's fear would prevent her from saying what she really thinks.

How are they going to improve their sex life? (Harry could be urged to touch Julie more often and not insist it lead to sex. Julie could be urged to initiate sex 50% of the time, not leaving all the responsibility for timing and invention to Harry.) The secret for all of the above is detail. As the Mediator pushes for the details to be confronted and resolved, new conflict and information may emerge. Time should be allowed for the unexpected. As the Mediator becomes more skilled, Mediations should get shorter.

Another analysis from a different Mediation might run as follows: “The seven people in this household have been polarized into two opposing groups, one which backs Jack and the other which backs Ralph, who are vying for power in the house. Those who have chosen to remain neutral have been harassed for not taking sides in the argument. The life of this household is threatened by the power struggle between Jack and Ralph. I suggest that this group decide whether they want Jack, Ralph, or both to move out, or what will be required if both of them are to stay. I have a prejudice here and that is that you, Ralph, will not be open to any cooperative behavior (as I’ve defined it), judging from your unwillingness to hear criticism and your general response to this meeting. I think it is you who should move out. But, for now, I am willing to negotiate whatever wishes the group expresses. I suggest that everybody else in the house stop taking sides and Rescuing both of these people and that you insist that they either settle their differences or move out.”

Again, people are asked what they think — whether they agree with the analysis or not. All sorts of things will have to be negotiated, such as how do Ralph and Jack decide who moves out? How will the one who is moving out be compensated? How much time will he have to move out? What if he refuses?

Another example of an analysis: “Mary and Susan, you have a strong and loving relationship which is being undermined by the fact that Susan wants to have lovers outside of your primary relationship and Mary does not. I think that you are going to have to negotiate this difference and come up with some pretty drastic compromises if your relationship is to survive. Mary, either you will have to accept Susan's desire to be non-monogamous, or Susan, you will have to give up your desire to have other lovers. I want you to know that this difference is usually extremely difficult, if not impossible to fix, but because of the strong love I see and feel between you, and because both of you share the idea that non-monogamy is a good idea, at least in theory, I think it will be possible to work out careful and detailed agreements about what you can do. First you might tell me what we are to work on — monogamy, non-monogamy, or compromise?”

This conflict is an extremely common and painful one for people. It is important that if people decide to work cooperatively on non-monogamy, that the details are carefully worked out and forever up for re-negotiation. Loving, tender care is necessary if it is to work.

Yet another analysis goes: “This working situation, which is supposedly one in which equality of power and decision-making prevails, is in fact not that at all. Some people in this organization have a great deal more power than others because of their seniority in the organization and because they happen to be men. There is a pretense that everyone is equal when in fact that is not true. John especially takes on a lot of power and a lot of responsibility, not only because he was here first and knows a great deal, but also because he has a tendency to assume power. However, he is not being given an opportunity to give this unequal power up since no one is filling the vacuum which he occasionally leaves. Everyone is responsible for this dilemma in that John is Rescuing and everyone else is allowing him to do the extra work and take the extra responsibility. It makes sense everyone is resentful: John, because of the extra work he does, and everyone else because of his tendency to talk more, interrupt, and make unilateral decisions. I suggest that John give up his extra power once and for all. I think he wants to, although perhaps not all at once. People in this group must decide whether they will or will not take on both the power and the responsibility which John will leave behind.”

Again, all of these alternatives can be negotiated. What will John do and not do? For how long? Who will take his place? What will be his compensation for giving up power, and so forth?

Every conflict is based on a number of contradictions out of which it is possible to find one major contradiction that subsumes all the others. The detection of this major contradiction is the substance of this section of the Mediation.

In the above examples, the major contradictions are:

- ◆ Harry is completely dependent on Julie for nurturing and intimacy (with sexual intercourse as its primary mode of expression), and Julie is dependent on Harry for economic support (and is suffering from isolation as a mother at home all day alone with a baby).
- ◆ Mary wants to be monogamous and Susan doesn't.
- ◆ Both Jack and Ralph want to be in charge and have the decision-making power in the house. (Secondarily, the rest of the members of the household have not taken their power, insisting that everyone equally share the decision making.)
- ◆ John feels angry and overworked but is not willing to give up his extra power. (Secondarily, the members of the collective want to take more power but have not been willing to do more work.)

Be careful that you don't make the error of pursuing a secondary, or lesser, contradiction to the exclusion or neglect of the major one. For example, it would be a waste of time to work out a carefully cooperative division of work between the people who are in the collective without pointing out the role of John and the results of his Rescue. A good Mediator must tenderly but emphatically nail John and his uncooperative behavior, always giving him and the group the benefit of the doubt. They would do it differently if they knew what "it" was and how.

Wrap-Up

Another Mediation

Sometimes it is impossible to get everything done that people hoped to achieve during one Mediation. The Mediation must keep shifting and reevaluating what is really possible given the time limitations and limitations on human energy. The Mediator must work hard not to Rescue by trying to fix everything. By this time your "average Mediator" has been moved by people's sweet honesty and deeply felt needs, and she feels the impulse to try to fix everyone up. New Mediators often work for hours, leaving on all fours and with not much to show for it. Don't do it. Let people do some work on themselves and the situation with the limited agreements you do have time to hammer out, and come back in several months for a "check up."

Mediations usually take no less than two hours and should not take more than six. Most of us find that after three to four hours, exhaustion sets in, the brain weakens and grows lax. Within the limits of the energy of the Mediator and the group, choose goals that can be accomplished. On the other hand, be careful not to short-cut working out satisfactory agreements in sufficient detail, or people will leave with a sense of having gotten little accomplished and having wasted their time and money.

Strokes

A Mediation should be ended with Strokes (verbal compliments). It is incumbent upon the Mediator to pace the Mediation in such a way that time is left for them. Strokes are the pay-off for the work of the

Mediation, and sometimes what happens can be predictive of what course the relationship will take. It has occasionally happened that at the end of a long and detailed Mediation, people cannot give strokes to each other; when all is said and done, “their juices have dried up.” It is difficult (and hardly desirable) to revitalize a relationship when the affection is gone.

On the other hand, it is more often true that after people have struggled long and hard to identify the course of their troubles and to come up with solutions, they have a new, revived sense of love and respect for each other. Freely-flowing strokes are a good sign because they mean that the relationship is still basically alive and “cooking.”

When people stroke each other at the ends of such hard work, their whole struggle is put into the context of mutual affection and a desire to cooperate. Strokes make it clear, and are a needed affirmation, that the driving force in all successful relationships is love and/or respect. Effective strokes should be clean, powerful and to the point. “I like the way you look,” “I like the way you acted during this Mediation,” “I like the way you talk,” “I like the way you make love,” “I like the way you smell,” “I like how open and honest you are.”

The Mediator should not hesitate to give the strokes she feels for the people she has worked with. It is best to wait until strokes are flowing freely between all other participants. Finally, it is important that the Mediator not leave the room without getting some strokes. This work is too hard, takes too much heart and caring, just to take your money and run. A few “You are a terrific Mediator” s will go a long way.