

**THE INNER CHILD AND MARRIAGE: REFLECTIONS FROM THE COURSE  
CARING FOR THE CAREGIVER**

***A CRIANÇA INTERIOR E O CASAMENTO: REFLEXÕES A PARTIR DO CURSO  
CUIDANDO DO CUIDADOR<sup>1</sup>***

***EL NIÑO INTERIOR Y EL MATRIMONIO: REFLEXIONES DEL CURSO DE  
CUIDADO DEL CUIDADOR***

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**ABSTRACT:** The objective of this case study, was to understand the effect of the discovery of the inner child in the conjugal relationship of the participants of the Course: TRA: Capacitation in Techniques of Self-Esteem Rescue - Caring for the Caregiver. This is a case study of a couple evaluated through an interview, carried out after the experience of the inner child rescue at the beginning of the course, recordings of the experience sharing and the register of observations in the researcher's notebook. To analyze the opinions collected, the methodology used was discourse analysis. The results showed a greater awareness of the interference of the inner child in the conjugal relationship and the need to be more attentive to its manifestations to avoid future conflicts. Therefore, the Care for the Caregiver course offered a learning space for the inner child and self-care, as well as a way to learn how to care for the other.

**KEYWORDS:** Inner child. Marital relationship. Self-knowledge.

**RESUMO:** O objetivo desse estudo de caso, foi compreender o efeito da descoberta da criança interior no relacionamento conjugal dos participantes do Curso: TRA: Capacitação em Técnicas de Resgate da Autoestima - Cuidando do Cuidador. Trata-se de um estudo de caso de um casal avaliado por meio de entrevista, realizada após a vivência do resgate da criança interior no início do curso, gravações das partilhas das vivências e o registro de observações no caderno de notas da pesquisadora. Para analisar as opiniões coletadas, utilizou-se como metodologia a análise do discurso. Os resultados apontaram, uma maior consciência da interferência da criança interior no relacionamento conjugal e a necessidade de estar mais atento diante de suas manifestações para evitar futuros conflitos. Portanto, o curso Cuidando do Cuidador ofereceu um espaço de aprendizagem do acolhimento da criança interior e de autocuidado, bem como uma forma de aprender a cuidar do outro.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Criança interior. Relacionamento conjugal. Autoconhecimento.

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**RESUMEN:** El objetivo de este estudio de caso fue comprender el efecto del descubrimiento del niño interior en la relación conyugal de los participantes del Curso: TRA: Formación en Técnicas de Rescate de la Autoestima - Cuidando al Cuidador. Se trata de un estudio de caso de una pareja evaluada a través de una entrevista, realizada luego de la experiencia de rescatar al niño interior al inicio del curso, grabaciones del intercambio de experiencias y el registro de observaciones en el cuaderno del investigador. Para analizar las opiniones recogidas se utilizó como metodología el análisis del discurso. Los resultados mostraron una mayor conciencia de la interferencia del niño interior en la relación conyugal y la necesidad de estar más atento a sus manifestaciones para evitar conflictos futuros. Por ello, el curso Cuidando al cuidador ofreció un espacio para aprender a acoger al niño interior y al autocuidado, así como una forma de aprender a cuidar de los demás.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Niño interior. Relación matrimonial. Conocimiento de sí mismo.

## Introduction

When it comes to marriage, the idea of a Cinderella and her prince "happily ever after", rushes to mind. However, the conjugal union constituted, initially, by dreams of a happy life, marked by passion, romantic love, illusions from fairy tales and finally, a great desire to fulfill the oaths made at the altar of being "together" in joy and in sadness, in health and in illness until death do them part, it ends in conflicts, endless suffering, and sometimes, in divorce. What happens between the optimistic dream of the altar and the frustration of living together?

The relevance of the theme is based on the evidence that at some point in the relationship, the couple will experience the consequences of the inner child's manifestation.

The inner child is the child we once were. It is the "suitcase, baggage" of experiences lived in childhood and which is within us. The inner child accompanies us throughout our lives and tends to influence our decisions and behaviors. The inner child is nothing but our Self, the true "I", the "I Am". The injured child is the one who has suffered situations of violence, deprivation of basic needs, abandonment, rejection, trauma, etc. These marks have consequences for adult life. For this reason, it is important to talk to this inner child and help him/her to understand with an adult look, the pain of the past, to encourage and support him/her to overcome the difficult situations that he/she had to face, so that the adult of today can detach themselves from these traumas kept in the basements of the unconscious, relieving the weight of the "bag" of feelings and suffering of the past. It is very therapeutic to accommodate all the unmet needs of the inner child.

The "victorious child" appears when the inner child manifests itself in a healthy way, bringing the strength and vital energy contained in the whole human being, which manifests

itself in the form of courage, enthusiasm and balance. The ignorance of this inner child may increase the conflict and trigger further dissatisfaction.

The Caring for the Caregiver Course offers this space for reflection and welcoming, promoting self-knowledge through its ten therapeutic experiences. The first of them rescues the inner child, and the other therapeutic experiences work on their suffering, welcoming and strengthening this child through the self-knowledge of today's adult.

Therefore, the purpose of this case study was to understand the effect of the discovery of the inner child on the marital relationship.

## **Method**

### **Study type**

This is a case study based on the Course called: Training in Self-Esteem Rescue Techniques - Caring for the Caregiver, taught by its creator, Prof. Dr. Adalberto de Paula Barreto. The Course had 26 participants, including two couples. After experiencing the rescue of the inner child, a semi-structured interview was conducted with one of the couples. During the week of the course, the teacher developed nine more complementary experiences of welcoming the inner child. The interview with the couple and the recordings of the shares after each experience were recorded and transcribed. Observations on the couple's participation during the course week were recorded in the researcher's notebook and transcribed for analysis.

For the case study, the couple participating in the Caring for the Caregiver Course, with more than ten years of marriage, was invited. Description: Married for 21 years, the couple has two children, a 13 year old boy and a 9 year old girl. He is 45 years old, she is 48 years old. Both are public servants and have a college degree.

### **Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

A couple enrolled in the Caring for the Caregiver Course was interviewed and signed the Informed Consent Form. For this study, the couple with less than ten years of relationship was established as an exclusion criterion. This research was approved by the Ethics Committee of Plataforma Brasil by CEP 958272. This study was carried out in Ceará, Brazil.

## Data Analysis

For the qualitative analysis of the interview, discourse analysis was used (BAKHTIN, 1992; ORLANDI, 1988; ROCHA-COUTINHO, 1998). Initially, the interviews were read to raise the main themes. This process resulted in the identification of categories. Subsequently, fragmentation was carried out, that is, a new analysis according to the themes listed initially, to establish the order of importance and the sequence of the themes found. Four central themes and one or more sub-themes were obtained for each category. The record of the other recordings and notes was compared throughout the week, to follow the evolution of the couple.

### Case Study

#### Arriving at the course...

##### Topic 1: Choice of Course

##### Category 1.1 - How did they get to this course

*[...] I started to observe my relationship, if I see the problem in him, the problem must be mine, so I will try to take care of myself. ... Then some time passed, our relationship was a little cold... On the 21st anniversary of my wedding, I said well, "I want to go and take the course caring for the caregiver, but I want you to go with me". What I really came to look for here is my essence, I came to take this course for me really, I came because I thought it was an opportunity for me to be with me. I took the opportunity to bring it, because I think this will give and "up" to our wedding (CECÍLIA, our translation).*

*I was dropped here blind; it was just like that. So, I had no expectations because I didn't know, I came completely blind, but I think it was good (CARLOS ALBERTO, our translation).*

#### After the experience of the Inner Child...

##### Topic 2: Discovering the influence of the inner child

##### Category 2.1 - Forgiveness and the inner child

*I think it is such an inner growth, making an alliance with this child, so that she helps me to grow. Because I think the best thing about this course is because I'm going to grow up. From the moment I ask this child for forgiveness and say, come with me, be happy by my side, I am an extremely serious person... (CECÍLIA, our translation).*

##### Category 2.2 - The inner child and the future of the relationship

*So, when I think of a child with me, I think it's great, because I will even be more relaxed with my children, because I am very strict with them, you know? I am a loving mother, but I am severe (CECÍLIA, our translation).*

*Now I think it will be a difference in the sense that we can work on this issue, that we can identify it, and take an adult, more positive attitude, and not let these previous wounds resurface like this, in moments of conflict (CARLOS ALBERTO, our translation).*

### **Category 2.3 - The search for the victorious inner child**

*[...] I take my life in a very serious way, you know? And I want my child's joy for me (CECÍLIA, our translation).*

#### *Topic 3: Inner child and marital relationship*

### **Category 3.1 - Discovery of the inner child**

*I think that this discovery of the inner child has to do with the growth of self-esteem, and this will influence our marriage, in the sense that we know how to separate what is my problem, personal, from what is a family problem, from what it's her problem (CARLOS ALBERTO, our translation).*

*I never did any work before I rescued this inner child. I said: this child will never show up, because I don't remember anything until I was eight years old. ..., but she appeared... So, I think that many times we were arguing at home, and I thought there were two children arguing. Like, he was talking about his fears, and I talking about my fears, and it was all mixed up in the middle of the relationship... (CECÍLIA, our translation).*

### **Category 3.2 - consequence of the discovery of the inner child and marriage**

*And from this perspective, now, we already have a lot of knowledge to know how to discern. I think, we must be reaching another level of relationship, in which we can identify before a conflict starts, identify what a conflict really is, what is inheritance of each one who is being brought there, to the middle of that conflict (CARLOS ALBERTO, our translation).*

*So now we're going to get the kids to play together, or we're going to be an adult at some point, someone has to make a decision, and so, even take that weight off my back, because I, I think I often do that, I hope he makes a decision, he doesn't, then I go and make it, you know? (CECÍLIA, our translation).*

#### *Topic 4: Marital conflict and the inner child*

### **Category 4.1 - The manifestation of the suffering of the inner child in the relationship.**

*In some moments, in discussions with her, I always thought she was very authoritarian, I think that the feeling I had about my mother manifested to me, that my mother was always a more authoritarian person, that person who ran the house (CARLOS ALBERTO, our translation).*

*My brothers all became alcoholics, they did nothing, they sat on the couch all day, and I think I mix a lot. It is the child of that time who looks at him, understand? When Carlos Alberto wakes up and goes to the computer to play, (Not that I think it's right to get up and stand in front of the notebook, I still think it's wrong), but, I identify in me, that girl who saw that situation of the brothers, doing nothing and I couldn't do anything. And I was irritated by that.*

*So, I think that I implicate with him for a previous situation (CECÍLIA, our translation).*

## Discussion

The motivating factor for studying a conjugal dyad is that, in its dynamics, lies the fact that there are two individuals and one conjugality. In the couple's dynamics there are two subjects, two life projects not communicated, two expectations, dreams and desires, two identities containing idiosyncratic stories inherited from their families of origin, each with their “inner child” injured or not, who, in the relationship together, they build and live with a conjugality, that is, a joint desire, a new life story in the form of a couple, constituting a conjugal identity. This marital identity is, metaphorically, a kaleidoscope of emotions and relational patterns inherited from the family of origin.

Marital satisfaction is undoubtedly a subjective concept, implying having one's own needs and desires satisfied, as well as corresponding, to a greater or lesser extent, to what the other expects, defining a reciprocal spontaneous giving and receiving (NORGREN *et al.*, 2004).

Norgren *et al.* (2004) affirm in their studies about marriage that one of the reasons given by spouses to remain married is because they believe that marriage is a partnership for life and because they feel responsible for each other, as well as because there is love. According to the authors, these reasons were presented in that order by the American and Canadian spouses and were among the first six reasons mentioned in all the countries studied, except for Chile.

The conjugal identity is marked by the basic needs, satisfied or unmet, of the inner child. The inner child is one of the archetypes presented by Jung:

The archetype essentially represents an unconscious content, which changes through its awareness and perception, taking on nuances that vary according to the individual consciousness in which it manifests itself (JUNG, 2008, p. 17, our translation).

The archetype of the inner child,

It is everything that is abandoned, exposed and at the same time the divinely powerful, the insignificant and uncertain beginning and the triumphant end. The “eternal child” in man is an indescribable experience, an incongruity, a disadvantage and a divine prerogative, an imponderable that constitutes an ultimate value or devaluation of a personality (JUNG, 2008, p. 300, our translation).

An inner child is understood to be all immature, infantile aspects, which make the subject suffer unnecessarily and in exaggeration, which can lead to illness (BOZZA, 2015, p. 128, our translation).

The Caring for the Caregiver Course, besides being a training for those who want to work with groups, is also a form of group therapy. Cecília (subject of this case study), said in an interview, that she asked her husband to give her, as a celebration of her 21 years of marriage, the couple's coming to the course, as she understood that the conjugal relationship needed some movement.

*I started to observe my relationship, if I see the problem in it, it must be my problem, so I will try to take care of myself. ... Then some time passed, our relationship was a little cold ... On the 21st anniversary of my wedding, I said very well, "I want to go and take caring of the caregiver course, but I want you to go with me" (CECÍLIA, our translation).*

All issues of suffering that lead the subject to seek therapies, can affirm themselves and be understood as aspects of their inner child that need to mature (BOZZA, 2015, p. 128, our translation).

The understanding about the archetype of the inner child is not new among psychoanalyst therapists, however it can be little used or known, among other therapeutic approaches. Although this view of the inner child is psychoanalytic, this concept is explored in the Caring for the Caregiver Course. Which has in its structural axis, systemic thinking. These two approaches are complementary in the final result of the course.

In the systemic approach, a couple can be understood as the smallest unit of social interaction. To think systematically is to think about the relational aspect of the couple. This is a family subsystem structured in the form of a dyad.

[...] When thinking about the couple, even in generic terms, it is common to evoke an idea associated with the affective dimension that preserves a man and a woman united. The commitment between them is more or less lasting, often with a view to generating children and forming a new nuclear family. (MONTEIRO, 2001, p. 2, our translation).

The authors Carter and McGoldrick (1995) highlight that the negotiation of this new conjugal bond marks a qualitative change in the life cycle of each partner's family of origin. The existence of the couple implies a greater level of differentiation and autonomy between the partners and their original family groups. The possibility of the beginning of a new generation is established.

Bowen (1978) developed the concept of *differentiation of the self* and postulated that the level of family differentiation that individuals acquire is transmitted by the family of origin. This level of *differentiation of the self* from the family of origin is fundamentally necessary for the development of new and healthy affective bonds. For the author, this need to differentiate

the self from the family of origin is also related to the need to establish some differentiation, when individuals propose to build and belong to new subsystems, such as marriage.

The dialectic of marriage can become the search for individuation.

*So, I think that many times we were arguing at home, and I thought there were two children arguing. So, he was talking about his fears, and I talking about my fears, and it was all mixed up in the middle of the relationship ... These discoveries of my child are making me rethink my marriage, as how was I in it... (CECÍLIA, our translation).*

Marriage as a means of individuation should be a path that one chooses, and not a social duty, as the spouses elect themselves for a confrontation of love and rejection, in which knowing oneself and the other can be knowing the good and evil (CARVALHO, 1999).

### **During the course...**

*And from this perspective, now, we already have a lot of knowledge to know how to discern. I think, we should be reaching another level of relationship, in which we can identify before a conflict starts, identify what is really a conflict, what is inheritance of each one that is being brought there, into the middle of that conflict (CARLOS ALBERTO, our translation).*

According to Diniz-Neto (2005), there are two axes that appear in the literature, on the studies of the processes of conjugal dynamics, in relation to the processes of formation and dissolution of conjugality: that of marital satisfaction/dissatisfaction and that of marital stability/instability.

A marital relationship, like a chemical compound, has unique properties of its own, in addition to the characteristics of the elements that merge to form the compound. It is an entity, new and different, but its properties, although unique, preserve a specific dynamic relationship with the elements that linked to its creation. In other words, the psychological principles that govern an individual's behavior and those that govern the behavior of a relationship are not the same (ACKERMAN, 1986, p.156, our translation).

Braz *et al.* (2005), points out that there is strong evidence of the damage caused by family dysfunctions in the development of children, that is, there is a positive correlation between disorders in the marital relationship and/or the parents as individuals and the child's behavior problems.

Thinking about the family and the couple systemically,

The important thing is to know that the family is a complex institution that is not limited to that core father, mother and son. It is immersed in a social and cultural broth and in its own broth of the several family generations that



preceded it, suffering the influence of a series of variables, which go beyond its own organization (GROISMAN, 2013, p. 111, our translation).

*So, when I think of a child with me, I think it's great, because I will even be more relaxed with my children, because I am very strict with them, you know? I am a loving mother, but I am severe (CECÍLIA, our translation).*

Thus, there is evidence that each spouse, the subject of this study, brought emotional losses from the family of origin, which marked the inner child in their respective childhoods, and today they manifest themselves in the form of conflicts in the marital relationship.

*In some moments, in discussions with her, I always found her to be very authoritarian, I think that the feeling I had about my mother manifested to me, that my mother was always a more authoritarian person, that person who ran the house. So I think that at different times, I saw my mother in her, and I believe that I reacted in a way that it was that child there who was facing the mother, but that today, the situation is different. That I'm an adult today, so I didn't have to be hearing things that way, that way (CARLOS ALBERTO, our translation).*

The child's motif represents the preconscious aspect of childhood in the collective soul. In this way, when forgetting the painful memories of the real childhood in the shade, from a needy child the young person becomes “needy of childhood, losing roots”. The archetype of the divine child brings the opposites of the old and the future, bringing the connection with the psychic roots and enabling creativity, the emergence of the new and the transformation (JUNG, 2008, p. 260-285, our translation).

According to Pincus and Dare (1987), the couple share a subjective organization. This organization determines unconscious choices and motivations. Each partner carries out an exchange of unconscious feelings which constitutes a kind of secret marriage contract.

This secret contract may be linked to an unconscious reparatory promise. According to Benedito (1996) if an individual seeks someone or a spouse, who represents

A reparatory promise of their past and split experiences constitutes a defensive projection, that is, a movement of the psyche in which unconscious contents remain trapped in the shadow and hinder the development of the personality. On the other hand, if the choice of partner represents a path to mutual development, it constitutes a creative projection - characterized by the attempt to integrate unconscious aspects into the conscience in favor of growth (CARVALHO, 1999, s/p, our translation).

Hillman (1971) also draws attention to this subjective world and points to the archetypal (subjective) constitution that is the child. The author states that this dimension helps the adult to rediscover his imagination. A mode of imagination that does not see the child as emotional vulnerability and imaginal reality, but as an imaginative power capable of revitalizing our

“rationalized fantasies”. It is to the myth of the child's redeeming strength that man clings, because he is the “triumphant end”.

It is also worth noting that after discovering the inner child, it is necessary to seek forgiveness for oneself, parents and spouse.

### Reaching the end of the course ...

*Because I think the best thing about this course is because I'm going to grow up. From the moment I ask this child for forgiveness and say, come with me, be happy by my side... (CECÍLIA, our translation)*

With regard to family forgiveness, it is certain that all people want to “forgive or be forgiven by someone, especially in our family, due to the acts that were performed in our childhood or adolescence, in an active or passive way” (GROISMAN, 2013, p 76, our translation).

As noted by Casarjian (1997), there is no relationship as important as that of parents with their children, with this relationship forming the “emotional foundation of our families” (CASARJIAN, 1997, p. 83, our translation).

Most of the time when parents or grandparents go back to the past, telling their family stories, when listening to them, it is noticed that most of the time they were conflicts considered normal, but poorly resolved. Many parents keep these conflicts to themselves, which they also end up passing on to their children unconsciously (LIMA, 2011, p. 1).

The paths of love are learned and chosen, and “each person brings into the relationship love and obstacles to the love they have learned” (CASARJIAN, 1997, p. 109, our translation). In many relationships there are incidents, of which one of the partners ends up getting hurt, with resentment and anger at the actions and attitudes of his partner, such as causing embarrassment towards friends, ignoring the other and being unfaithful. "Allowing really unacceptable behaviors to persist causes resentment, guilt and dysfunctional behavior, devitalizing the couple." In this sense, it is important to clarify in the relationship what is acceptable and what is not, for both (CASARJIAN, 1997, p. 112, our translation).

In Casarjian's (1997, p. 145, our translation) thoughts, “forgiving yourself is probably the biggest challenge you will encounter: essentially, it is the process of learning to love and accept yourself, *no matter what happens*”.

[...] the purpose of self-forgiveness is to clarify illusions. Fears and self-judgments that imprison us in the role of our own jailers; is to discover the

option of retiring from this merciless mystery, so that we can stimulate the full truth of who and what we are (CASARJIAN, 1997, p. 145, our translation).

Therefore, although the manifestation of the inner child in the marital relationship, a subjective issue, added to the objective issues (economic situation, work, home, daily life, etc.), marriage points to an unparalleled potential to satisfy some of the basic needs of the human being (belonging, affection, protection, security, love, care). Thus, the couple under study, despite the conflicts, still maintains the desire for conjugality and envisions new strategies to improve the relationship from the discovery of the inner child.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Other comparative studies are suggested, that is, that interviews be carried out with several couples and in different Training courses in Self-Esteem Rescue Techniques - Caring for the Caregiver, as well as in other therapeutic works that rescue and welcome the inner child for the production more scientific evidence.

### **Final considerations**

The transformations experienced by the couple, after the rescue and reception of the inner child, could be seen in the spouses' report and behavior, which represents a valuable aspect of scientific evidence.

The analyzed data are not conclusive, but it was possible to verify, through this scientific methodology, that the therapeutic process that occurred during a week of the Caring for the Caregiver course, provided the discovery of the inner child and the awareness of its interference in the marital relationship.

In the therapeutic process, which took place during the course, the couple gradually worked on issues related to their inner child, and became softer, restoring intimacy. As each became aware of the interference of their inner child in the marital relationship, the recognition of dysfunctional patterns of behavior that need to be changed increased. Therapeutic experiences (movement of internal forces) and sharing and group support (movement of external forces), helped the couple in the search for more differentiation.

As each member of the conjugal dyad became more differentiated throughout the therapeutic week, that is, when they start to differentiate the couple's issues, from their experiences in the respective families of origin, they began to reframe and resize these

experiences in the current reality, seeking an own unique path, creating a space for personal and couple choices. Their self-esteem increased, and the intimacy between them naturally increased during the week. Each, within the therapeutic process of self-knowledge, had the opportunity to review their childhood stories, pains and sufferings and transform them into acceptance, forgiveness and strength to face the couple's challenges going forward.

The spouse's expectation regarding the course Caring for the caregiver was: *“I expected it to be a self-help course with dynamics. But what is experienced here has transcended any expectations I might have; no matter how positive it was”* (our translation).

They also state that the experience of participating in the course Caring for the Caregiver: *“was amazing. The transformations that happened in me, seem to me to be definitive”* (our translation).

The wife attended the course to: *“learn to live with me and enable me to live with the other”* (our translation).

Her initial needs were: *“The need to be with myself and take the weight off my shoulders”* (our translation).

The wife takes the following learning from this experience into professional and personal life: *“I have rescued my inner child and took it with me hand in hand, both (she and her inner child) forgiven and loved. This changed my expectations and self-confidence”* (our translation).

Thus, getting in touch with the inner child points to the differential of this therapeutic experience, as it moved the couple in search of themselves. It provided this look for the Self, for the “I am”, which was fundamental for the encounter with oneself, as well as for overcoming the crisis and the cooling of the marital relationship.

Therefore, the TRA-Taking Care of the Caregiver course offered a space for learning self-care, as well as a way to learn how to take care of others with adult behavior. The rescue of the inner child and its reception offered a different way of looking at the situation of marital conflict. In this therapeutic week it was possible to raise evidence that through self-knowledge and awareness the manifestations of the inner child (past) in the present life of the conjugal dyad, it is possible to prevent conflicts and somatizations. This was evidenced in the report of a new repertoire of conflict resolution strategies, instead of continuing to resort to the same behavior patterns learned in the family of origin.

This couple sought to give movement to the relationship in the name of love.

Love is empowerment, it is self-confidence, it is flow. It is trusting the other's inner strength. Love is everything that liberates and moves life from generation to generation. It has the subtlety of keeping the inner flame lit, illuminating the path to be followed, but this does not always happen in relationships. The love that makes me and the other suffer is not love, it is the groan of the injured child that carries a guilt, it is the “shadow” that needs to be seen (MARTINI, 2019, p. 37, our translation).

The “shadow” of the spouses was seen. It is possible to move on with adult love.

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