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Deconstructing Patriarchy in the Healing Arts

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Deconstructing Patriarchy in the Healing Arts

Sometimes we perpetuate the very systems we want to change because it's the only way we know. Making a change in the outer world can require a shift in our inner perspective.

"I've been in the healing arts as a Zero Balancing practitioner for 15 years, supporting people on their healing journeys. I started out as a certified practitioner at 26 years old, ready to fix everyone and bring them health and happiness through my newly acquired (and very exciting) knowledge and skills. Fifteen years of practice later, having become a Zero Balancing teacher and having the privilege of shepherding others through their own practitioner learning, I've had a lot of opportunity to think about the role of healer.

I've struggled with how to do my best work, serve others, and care for myself. I've challenged myself to do this in ways that don't reinforce the patriarchal models of the archetypal healer that predominate the culture I grew up in.

The healer archetypes I've been most influenced by are;

The Doctor, the Priest, The Shaman, The Witch, The Guru/teacher.

While these five archetypes are very different, they all share a problematic theme. For the most part, they create a separation between the healer as doer, and the person being healed as passive. The separation involves an authority figure, who knows better than you do, knows what you need for your healing and how you should do it. Whether it's the doctor prescribing your medication, the witch giving you a magic potion or spell, or the priest absolving your sins... the means are different but the type of relationship is consistent. You (the client/patient/student) give up some of your own inner authority in return for the security of being told what's wrong and how to fix it. It is often very reassuring but it's also limiting.

Sometimes my clients want this kind of role from me - unsurprisingly, it's what they know! They want to know what's wrong, and then for me to 'fix' it. Unconsciously they're asking me to make everything better without having to make any challenging changes in their own life. Sometimes I want this too! And yet, having responsibility for my own life has become a beautiful freedom that comes from taking up that mantle for myself.

If I'm not the authority on my client's health, then what is my job? What is the point of someone even coming to see me at all?

Those of you in the healing arts field may have encountered the concept of a 'client centered' or 'client led' approach. This means the client is respected as the key authority (they author their own story) on their health, life and wellbeing. In Zero Balancing, we learn specific touch skills to connect with our client's body wisdom, and learn to follow their lead to create the environment of trust and relaxation required for deep healing.

We all have that inner wisdom and we all need facilitators or guides to help us navigate tricky areas - like an experienced rock climbing friend holding the rope while we edge down the rockface. The person holding the rope doesn't need to tell us where to make our foothold - that's our responsibility.

What does this type of facilitation look like in action? It looks like your practitioner listening deeply – and not just the content of your spoken words - but to all of you; Your body language, the way you slump at certain thoughts, how your whole countenance brightens when you mention your new job, the way your voice becomes vibrant when you mention something that expresses deep truth, or how the energy in the room feels flat when you're talking from a less embodied place.

Client-led healing looks like skillful questions guiding you to uncover what you need to support healing. Through touch, your practitioner 'listens' with their hands to feel where your body is asking for help and release tension, bring greater vitality, or realign bones. Throughout this healing conversation, your practitioner continues to follow all your non-verbal cues. Your rate of breathing, subtle facial expressions, and energy in the room are all signals of communication that lead the session to be just what YOU need.

Ultimately, *facilitated healing* like this creates a space of self-reflection and non-judgement where your own wisdom emerges and guides you to make those small changes that will gradually lead you to huge improvements in your health and life.

Outside a patriarchal mindset we are all capable of great flaws and great gifts, and the two are in no way exclusive of one another.

I have often been disillusioned when the most skilled healers and practitioners are not perfected beings at all times, the way I used to believe they should be. I learned early on that the most revered teachers and healers are capable of having significant shadow parts. While we do definitely need to hold one another accountable for our actions, we also need to understand that the healer is a ROLE that people step in and out of, rather than someone's innate and ongoing nature.

This too is part of dismantling patriarchy. The Patriarchal model that most of us are familiar with is one of hierarchy and *fixed* roles. The King is always the King, and is above and better than those below. That same paradigm filters down (mostly unconsciously) into how we have traditionally related to Doctors, Priests, and healers in general. Realizing that we actually do not exist in rigid hierarchies (outside of the military and a few other select institutions), and that our

favorite healer can also be our broken-hearted friend crying on our shoulder is quite a shift at first! This fractures the image of an authority figure as an almighty, always fully integrated and healed person, and it can be a painful transition.

The key is understanding the difference between the role and the individual. As individuals, we have complex personalities that are (hopefully) evolving us to be our best selves as much of the time as possible! However, I know I have days living mostly from my whiniest, most helpless and fragile self - parts of me that may always be there, but hopefully not running the show too often. Even during my low or fragile times, when I step into my teacher role or my Zero Balancing Practitioner role, I can access different qualities in myself. My helplessness and fragility aren't where I'm acting from for that time.

We're all responsible for transforming the client-practitioner relationship from patriarchal models to something new, and we all have the opportunity to take up the mantle of authoring our own healing journey.

I invite you to visit these ideas philosophically, and also notice how you feel in your body next time you interact with people inhabiting different roles. What unconscious postures do you take, or ways do you relate that you hadn't even noticed before? Whether you're in a healer/teacher role or client role, what unconscious ideas about these roles are you bringing with you? Can you feel it in your body? By bringing awareness to our unconscious beliefs and internal postures, we do our part to deconstruct patriarchy in the healing arts!