

INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF HOLISTIC LAWYERS

"A forum for dialogue and support of holistic approach to law."



IAHL

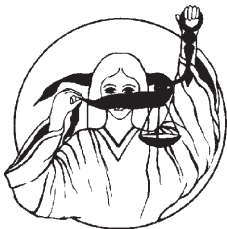
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It's All About Relationships
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ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF HOLISTIC LAWYERS

The IAHL is a non-profit membership and educational 501 (c) (3) organization established in 1991. Our members are lawyers, law students, law professors, judges, mediators, psychologists and other members of the supporting general public, worldwide. We serve our membership through a national/international referral database, networking, and sharing resources through our quarterly newsletter, website and educational conferences and training. For more information check out our web site at www.iahl.org



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carl Michael Rossi is both an attorney and a therapist. As an attorney he practiced in New York for ten years doing primarily criminal trials. As his practice branched into "Civil" trials, he was struck by how "un-civil" they in fact were. He believes this to be rooted in two similar problems. People have trouble listening to each other. And, specifically, lawyers have difficulty listening to their clients.

For several years he has offered seminars and workshops to teach listening skills to both lawyers and non-lawyers. He has presented at the annual conference of the International Alliance of Holistic Lawyers www.iahl.org and been a featured speaker and moderator at www.RenaissanceLawyer.com. His writings have appeared in several publications such as The Collaborative Review, The Florida Bar Journal, and AARP's legalhotline Quarterly.

Since 1999, cMr has also been very actively involved in Collaborative Practice. This approach to dispute resolution allows him to engage his skills as both an attorney and as a therapist. He is the creator and moderator of CollabLaw, a forum for discussion used by, presently, over 550 Collaborative Practitioners world-wide. He has served on the Boards of the International Academy of Collaborative Professionals and of the Collaborative Law Institute of Illinois.

He received his J.D. from Fordham University and his M.A. from Notre Dame. For 6 years he served with The Legal Aid Society of New York City. He is a former partner of Rossettie, Rossettie & Martino, of Corning, NY. He is a certified group co-facilitator with the ManKind Project. Oh yes, and a certified in-line skate instructor.

Relationships?

Sure.

They're all about me.

Yes, I intend a pun; I like puns. Relationships are "all about" me in that they are everywhere. We are never not in relationship. In fact in the very moment we speak of "I", we have created "you".

Relationships are also all "about me" in that I am always creating the "other" person in my mind; deciding who they are and what they are all about with only limited input from them, from what they say, or from what they do.

Effective relationships require an awareness that they result from input from the 'other' that is processed by the "me". From that awareness it is possible to see the particular "you" that "I" create in a given circumstance.

We strive to be open to another person as s/he "truly is". But that really isn't completely possible. We can only know another person as s/he is *in our experience* of him/her.

A lot of what we do in life is listen. Particularly as holistic lawyers, we believe we are good at it. At a minimum we are thoroughly convinced of our desire to be solid and effective Listeners.

And so we learn to minimize distractions and to give our attention and to reflect what the other person is saying. And we believe we are being good listeners. And we are. And yet, there is a piece that I think is missing in all that.

The missing piece is the active recognition of our own involvement in the process. We tend to see it as a one-way street; s/he talks – I listen. And when I do so, what I am hearing is him/her. That isn't completely true.

We are always hearing and experiencing another person through our own filters. With this process we process the information we receive from the other and we create who s/he is for us. Let's look at some of those filters.

Specifically we'll look at Projection, Mirroring, Transference and the Shadow. I want to say two things about these terms and the processes they describe. You may well have heard the words and perhaps even used them. Very often, these terms are used to describe others as opposed to ourselves. My hope is to bring them to your awareness as a part of you.

The other thing is that very often they are used in a negative way; that they are bad things to do. "You're projecting onto me. Stop it!" Or even to suggest that they are symptomatic of emotional problems or deficiencies. "You've got real transference issues."

My hope is to bring them out of the arsenal of attack and see them as normal parts of the process of relationship. They are integral parts of how we process information about an 'other' and if we either ignore them in ourselves or demonize them, we will run into problems in relationships with clients, with colleagues, with friends-family-lovers, even with ourselves. Obviously this is not a Psychology course, so I'll just be summarizing my understanding of these things and hoping that in doing so, I'll be helping you to understand them and to get started working with them in your life.

So first let's look at Mirroring. As the term suggests, it's about relating to the other person as if s/he is a mirror. Or as I phrase it, "How much of me do 'I see' when I look at you?"

Mirroring is rooted in a basic belief that there is no "thou"; that you and I are actually one and the same. Perhaps you've had encounters with a person or two who seemed genuinely surprised that you don't like the same things they do or who never expresses an opinion different from yours? S/he may even question the "relationship" between you if such differences come to light?

But what I want to focus you on is the positive aspects of mirroring. It is the way in which we seek to see the commonalities between us. Without that process, what we will be left looking at always is how different you are from me. Mirroring is a process that keeps us looking instead at how much we have in common. How much alike we are. It is a process that supports what, I believe is a fundamental truth about our unity.

The next process I want to look at might be considered hyperactive Mirroring or perhaps Mirroring on steroids. Projection is that process of ascribing to another qualities that are, in fact, mine. Or, "How much of what 'I see' in your, is actually me?"

Like Mirroring, Projection is rooted in a search for connection and a belief that connection requires sameness. When we engage in projection it tends to follow a simple pattern. Onto people we want to like, we project our good qualities; onto people we don't want to like, our not so good ones. And this process doesn't wait until we "know" the other person. Far from it. It begins the very moment we lay eyes on him/her. It works with mirroring to begin to shape how we experience the 'other' person; to create the filter through which we will hear anything s/he says and judge anything s/he does.

Also like mirroring, it offers a wonderful opportunity for seeing how much we are in fact very similar. Rather than forming a decision based on that projection, it can be used as a way to check out the full extent of the similarity between us. Before that is possible, though, we must accept that it is happening and be prepared to recognize the particular quality of "me" that I am projecting onto "you".

A third process, since I'm talking mostly to lawyers, might be considered third-party mirroring. Transference brings in our thoughts about past "experiences" with 'other'ness. The way I phrase it is "How much of what 'I see' in you is actually him/her?"

Like Projection, we transfer onto folks we want to like the nice qualities of those other others. On those we're not ready to like, the not so nice ones.

Ever hear someone say, women are usually _____, or you're not like 'other men'? Herein lie the foundations of future transferences. Of future reactions to a new 'other' as if s/he were actually one or more of those previous 'others'.

So if mirroring and projection are seen as ignoring differences to find sameness with 'me', transference could be seen as ignoring differences to find the sameness among all 'other's. So it is a process that works contrary to the quest for oneness in that it tends to over exaggerate the difference between 'me' and 'you' by giving any one 'you' all the nice or not so nice traits of all other 'you's. Thus creating a 'me' and everyone else kind of feeling; or even 'me' against the world.

All of these processes are normal. They are even beneficial. The process of transference, for example, is an extension of normal learning. It is a good thing that we are able to learn that this thing that looks like fires that we've seen before, could cause a big problem if we stick our hand in it like we did with one (hopefully not more) of the earlier things we encountered that looked like fire.

The normal processes, however, can also cause untold damage to any relationship if they are allowed to run on their own. And that's what happens if we try to hide, repress or deny that they are there and more importantly the nature that they take for us individually.

That process, of hiding repressing or denying parts of ourselves and how we operate, is referred to as the Shadow. Anyone remember the old radio show tagline? "Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows." Well this is like that. This shadow is the self that we try to pretend we are not. And the more we pretend, the more it can "take over".

This is nowhere more true than with the processes of mirroring, projection and transference. If we try to act as if they aren't operating, what will happen is that any bump in any relationship will appear to us to be all about the 'other' person.

If we instead can recognize that this IS how I operate and then begin to see the particular qualities, traits and experiences that we are mirroring, projecting and transferring, then we can begin to see how much of our reaction is to the 'other' person that we are creating using these processes. And that will help us to actually experience the other person as s/he truly is. In all the warm ways in which we are very much the same and all the truly wonderful ways we are each unique.

I wish that warm, safe excitement of relationship for each of us.