



PSYCHOENERGETICS

A BODY-MIND APPROACH TO DEPTH WORK AND PROCESS FACILITATION

The Importance of Disappointment

*adapted from the work of Ian Craib
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for the PSEN Training Program*

Introduction

There is much about our modern world that increases disappointment and at the same time encourages us to hide from it, and to act as if what is good in life does not include the bad.

For example, modern people can cling to child-like beliefs such as:

- *We can love and be loved by another person without having to give up other aspects of our lives.*
- *We can have children without making sacrifices for them.*
- *We can love without ambivalence and hatred.*
- *We can make decisions about our lives without being bounded on all sides by the needs and actions of others.*
- *We can grow without pain and loss.*
- *In the end, we can grow and live endlessly, without facing death.*

The premise of this work is that we can only make life better if we can recognize and incorporate the darker sides of life, such as disappointment, loss and death.

Paradoxically, the more we deny this reality, the more difficult our lives become, and the more we become involved in breaking the links between people.



CHAPTER ONE

Depth work has something important to offer, but that something often runs counter to the expectations people have about what it takes to change, and what people might hope to gain from psychotherapy, and how to think about the wider culture and society in general.

Sometimes we pursue psychotherapy as a place of refuge, not necessarily as a place to confront what doesn't work, and change it.



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- *Depth work will require us to examine and re-think our unconscious and unquestioned assumptions and expectations of ourselves and of the world.*

There is often a number of complex and contradictory processes going on within the self. Nothing is ever simply ‘good’ or ‘bad’; and most things are at the same time good and bad.

The anatomy of this particular emotion teaches us that our wishes, desires, hopes and expectations have limits and boundaries, and we have to learn to honor and respect this fact, in order to reconcile and adapt ourselves to what life has to offer us – and not cling to what we want from life.



Disappointment is what happens, and what we feel, when something we expect, intend, or hope for does not materialize.

- *We cannot do everything that we want to do.*

~ Desire ~

Disappointment is what we feel when something we expect, intend, hope for or desire does not materialize.

The most basic motivational force that we have as human beings is **desire** – needing urgently, yearning, to the point of almost willing something into existence.

Sometimes we desire something so completely that we revert to our infantile, demanding selves and scream for it. Sometimes we will break things, threaten to hurt, or actually hurt, ourselves, and others, in order to secure the object of our desire.

We all have desires, whether we like it or not.

On the inside, it is not a matter of simply wanting something, but needing it so urgently, that without it, life seems unbearable.

“If I yearn hard enough, long enough, if I feel this pain sufficiently and intensely enough, then my desire will be realized.”



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Most of us learn to eventually survive the disappointments of desire, with a lot of heartache.

We learn to accept that what we desire does not always exist; and if it does exist, we can't always have it. We can desire something without necessarily hoping for it, and certainly without expecting it.

But sometimes, we believe something should happen simply because we desire it to happen, and we find ourselves unable to give up our desire for an outcome, despite all the evidence to the contrary that we are presented with. (“*So and so* is really the right one for me!”)

Such insistent beliefs are not a result of insanity, and not the reaction to some trauma, but still do not quite stand the test of ‘reality’.

Often, there is also certain social processes going on around us that make reality testing about our desires more difficult, and that perhaps encourage us to believe that what we desire should always be realized.

We may often be led to believe that we can always achieve personal fulfillment, make the space for personal reflection and self-expression, and obtain the personal growth that we desire – and often times, without any negative consequences, and at no personal cost.

- *We have desires, whether we like them or not.*
- *Desire is not the same as hope.*

~ Hope ~

We are not quite so driven by basic life forces when we *hope*.

To hope for something implies that we know that hope may not be realized, and that we have made some judgment about what reality can offer, and we are testing it out.

We can discover that we also have unrealistic and thus unrelenting hopes, which is actually a kind of *hoping against hope*. When this is the case, we find ourselves maintaining the hope against the evidence to the contrary.

On the whole, we like to have hopes, they are among the things that tend to keep us going forward. We can even fight hard and expend great energy to maintain our hope.



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There are times when hope seems to mean everything to us, when giving up hope is to plunge into nothingness or despair.

- *There is a connection between hope and our ideals.*

~ Hope and Ideals ~

Our ideals reflect how we would like the world to be, as well as the sort of people we would like ourselves to be.

Without our ideals, nothing would seem worthwhile; we need to hold onto them. But at the same time we need to accept that our ideals are rarely ever realized.

- *It is a paradox of our existence that we have to be in **both** of these positions at the same time.*

If we are certain we are to achieve our ideals, we follow a blind desire, but this carries within us more of a *persecutory* nature. If the world, or ourselves, do not match up to our ideals, then we will punish and force the world, or ourselves, to do so.

There are inevitably times when reality itself – our social reality and our natural world around us, and future in it – become uncertain. Often, we will not quite know what to do in the face of such uncertainty.

- *In response to this kind of uncertainty, we develop certainty about our own wishes, hopes and desires.*

We are then entangled and confused by trying to maintain these certainties, which seems preferable to the ego, instead of experiencing the pain of disappointment and the inadequacies of uncertainty.



Sometimes, we try to abandon our hopes, to avoid the despair that always lurks behind disappointment. This becomes a kind of abstention from those areas of life where our difficulties most often maintain themselves.

- *We might decide that since we cannot absolutely certain of everything, then we will not certain of anything.*



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Or we might decide that since we cannot always be sure of what is right or good or beautiful, then nothing in particular can be right or good or beautiful, and then we don't have to work harder at sorting through the complexity of these things.

When this happens, our inner life becomes empty, and we tend to become cynical and hardened towards our outer life, and end up being manipulative towards people and events for our own modest purposes.

In these modern times, deeper process work has the public expectation to provide people with comfort and understanding, help and support. We expect it to ease pain, sort through difficulties and problems, resolve conflicts, and enable people to find themselves, and satisfy their needs.

The themes of removing blocks and undoing repression, and the encouragement of one's expression of needs, feelings and desires, - has become common in modern psychologies.

It is not unusual to hear people claim the right to self-expression, rights to have their needs met in relationships, and rights to a vocational calling – and this should happen, or else! Sometimes these needs will over ride one's willingness and ability to connect well with others.

- *The subtleties, difficulties and complexities of relatedness can be set aside or ignored in pursuit of one's own personal wishes and aims.*



There is a tendency to turn our needs, wishes and hopes into *infantile demands* whenever they are bound up by an underlying sense of omnipotence. Then, when these needs go unmet, people feel free to rage against a world that will not be what they want it to be.

This tends to be an avoidance of the following disappointment:

- *I spend my life surrounded by other people who are more or less independent of me, and they are constantly doing things on their own account, independent of my wishes.*

The pursuits of personal fulfillment, self-expression and spiritual enlightenment can maintain infantile fantasies of omnipotence, grandiosity, and satisfaction without effort.

The very powerful idea and possibility of self-expression in deeper process work needs careful examination, and has to be balanced against considerations for others.



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(For example, marital affairs.)

Cultural pressures having to do with wanting to help people, to ease suffering, to be effective, to be good at our jobs, etc. – can make us vulnerable to our own denial of the necessity and inevitability of human suffering – and the disappointments this invariably brings.

When we deny our disappointments as practitioners, we can construct blueprints of what people *ought* to be feeling, *ought* to be like, and we can too easily set about trying to manipulate or even force people into these blueprints – making them into cut outs of ‘gingerbread people’.

Any crucial commitment to anything worthwhile must involve at the very least an ability to embrace something that isn’t perfect, and to risk the loss of what has been embraced.

It involves facing the inevitable loss of the idealized object, for the gain of the one that is actually there. This can be quite hard to bear.

“The difference between a mature and an immature person lies in an ability to acknowledge the existence of psychological vulnerability without claiming that it invalidates everything or anything the person might say. The person is deeply in touch with the sense of being at risk and deeply in touch with the knowledge that is possible for each of us to go mad.”

- Sherry Turkle



In this way, depth and process work cannot and must not be offered as a guarantee or even a guide to “a good life”, or as a cure that is bound to work, as a ever-available bringer of relief from pain and anxiety, or as a way of assuring personal change, although something of all or any of these might inevitably result.

The developmental process can only deepen and be effective – by exerting the necessary effort and risk of the work - if the person has a realistic idea of what it truly is about, is prepared to undertake the potential benefits and risks of the exploration, and can accept the limits and boundaries of their exploratory ground.

Psychological development depends on ‘*staying in the fire*’, to the point where we begin to understand our painful disappointments, and find that they might actually be bearable, and that they might even be useful, in some vital, unforeseen way.



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Perhaps in some other age, this might have simply been called 'life'.

Thinking about the possibility as well as the unavoidability of disappointment in depth work - considering how we may be disappointments to our clients, and wondering how we might be able to address this inevitability, keeps us from false hopes and promises of a fix or a 'cure' - which would only leave the real 'working through' process to someone else to provide.

Process facilitation can be viewed as a process of learning to be, when neither the process, nor the being in itself, is necessarily a comfortable experience, and there is no guarantee-able outcome.

The results of any such experience is always *ambivalent*.

Learning how to do effective depth work, and learning how to activate love, requires of us learning how to suffer for whatever is genuinely worthwhile. It is what Joseph Campbell often said was the '*joyful participation in the sorrows of the world*'.



- "*Madness is being unable to find anybody who can stand you.*"
- John Rickman

As practitioners or helpers of any kind, we need to respect someone's symptoms, and in fact respect their particular way of madness, and what might be the impossibility of 'cure', and sometimes, even of significant improvement.

At times, psychological work with those who suffer greatly allows for the person to not grow worse, and maintain the functionality they have.

For some clients, a realistic therapeutic aim is to respect and allow someone's symptoms, where others have refused to allow it; to respect someone's genuine suffering as a choice which might be, in proper context, their best choice.

The denial of disappointment is then, double-sided:

- *We might deny it because we cannot stand the suffering of others; then, I would have to accept my own suffering as well.*
- *We might deny it because we cannot tolerate our own sense of failure, our inability to achieve we set out to do – alleviate the other's suffering.*



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When we as practitioners can't bear these disappointments ourselves, we will tend to become prescriptive in our interventions and attempts to help, and inadvertently turn people in 'gingerbread' cut outs of people – that the culture at large seems to need.

For example:

Having a baby, getting married, being promoted at work – all of these good things often bring unexpected feelings of loss and depression – which in many cases are quite appropriate, since they involve the loss of situations and relationships that will never return.



“A patient in psychotherapy does not literally return to childhood to unlearn the self-destructive pattern he evolved in growing up, although he might engage in much regressive experimentation in order to undo that negative learning.

What is essential is that he be able to relinquish his attachment to his pathway – be able to say to himself: “I have wasted X years in a painful and useless pursuit; this is sad, but I know have an opportunity to try another approach.” This is hard for people to do.

There is a strong temptation to rationalize our wrong turnings as a necessary part of development (“it taught me discipline”), or to deny that we participated fully in them (“that was before I became enlightened”).

*Giving up these two evasions always leads to despair, but as Alexander Lowen points out, **despair is the only cure for illusion**. Without despair we cannot transfer our allegiance to reality – it is a kind of mourning period for our fantasies.*

Some people do not survive this despair, but no major change within a person can occur without it.”

- Philip Slater
Earthwalk