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**Healing Personal Depression And Anxiety**  
**For Good**  
**The Only Self-Help Solution You'll Ever Need**

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## *Chapter Nine*

### **Relationships, Anxiety, And Depression**

While my life is no model for successful relationships, training, research, and life experience have taught me a few beneficial things, especially when depression and anxiety emerge as issues in relationships.

The U.S. Census bureau reports the median duration of marriage to be about 8 years.<sup>1</sup> That is a rather inconsolable fact for anyone believing in marriage for the long term. There are many reasons for marriage or relationship break-ups. Most of the reasons can be distilled down to how one or both partners feel.

**A**nxiety, a major factor in relationship disturbances, represents a bioenergetic disturbance of the organism that affects how we react emotionally. Organomists, bioenergetic therapists, and Gestalt therapists encourage “patients” to experience and tolerate their anxiety. By engaging in and learning biophysical and psychological exercises, the organism’s ability to tolerate anxiety is strengthened. When strengthened, emotional contact functions can be maintained during episodes of disturbance, preserving rational thinking to enable rational decision making and rational actions. In highly charged emotional situations, with couples or individuals having a low tolerance for anxiety, emotional contact is dampened resulting in irrational decisions and severe actions that would not have been taken if emotional contact prevailed. These irrational decisions and actions include, but are not limited to leaving the scene or fleeing from the situation, withdrawal, anger, violence, reactions where total contact with the environment is momentarily lost or split off including psychotic reactions, depression and despair, separation or divorce. This is not to say that leaving the scene, separation, or divorce, especially with violent, overly aggressive, or irreconcilably arrogant people, is not warranted. But most emotionally charged situations can be effectively healed through dialogue, if the individuals are capable of sustaining emotional contact with each other and do not split off as a result of their inability to tolerate a heightened level of anxiety.

Freud and Reich, finding little disagreement in the analytic professions, concluded that blocked sexual excitation is converted into feelings of anxiety.<sup>2</sup> This is true for other repressed or blocked feelings.

Feelings are directly impacted by anxiety. Most people, consistent with the thinking of traditional psychiatry and psychology, want to avoid the unpleasantness of anxiety. Most of us, are taught to avoid anxiety. However, the price for avoidance is that the unconscious or psychic forces we are unaware of controls and determines our behaviors, especially in relationships, not rational thinking. Anger expression towards our partners, is an almost perfect way to control anxiety. When angry or enraged, anxiety is not felt. We intuitively learn this as we mature, and often use it to control anxiety. Because anger is a secondary emotion and covers over other emotions, we know there is always another feeling hiding beneath it, whether it be anxiety, hurt or emotional pain, feelings of low self-esteem, reactions to insults or perceived insults, and so on. Many techniques, including a quickened form of character analysis, Short Term Dynamic

Psychotherapy (STDP), developed by psychiatrist, Habib Davenloo, rapidly address these issues by techniques designed to increase anxiety. His book, *Unlocking the Unconscious*, explains the process as a method for overcoming resistance and confronting problems of the unconscious.<sup>3</sup> The organonist I was in therapy with also practiced STDP with me and taught me about the approach. It was very effective. However, one of the caveats of STDP, is that the person must be relatively psychologically healthy, given the rapidity of the approach and anxiety it can unleash. Rather than suppress or control anxiety, the healthy approach is to feel it, engage in a routine of exercises enabling your organism to tolerate a higher level of anxiety without attempting to suppress or restrain it, and to learn what is often behind the anxiety. For example, some folks who experience anxiety each time a sexual encounter looms, may discover, on self-reflection, that their low opinion of themselves as a sexual being or fear of being judged by their partner may be at the root. When this is conscious, you can enter into a dialogue with your partner that usually results in soothing or eliminating the anxiety.

In any stage of a relationship, depression and anxiety can emerge as a problem. Considering that we have two different individuals merging in a relationship, with different developmental histories and two different character structures, unintended problems can arise. Many individuals generally have no clue why they are suddenly engaged in angry, hostile, critical interactions, or become anxious or depressed within the relationship, when everything was loving and tender for so long. While they may wrongly presume it is their partner, it is often the interaction between the partners. The responsibility for interactions is equally distributed between the two. One partner may feel justified in their anger or criticism. Unbeknownst to them, it is frequently the clash of their beliefs and expectations, not necessarily anything either did to deserve the anger or hostility. The long honeymoon phase of a relationship can often take more than a few years to unfold. Thus, the 8 year median divorce rate is understandable. One partner may have unvoiced expectations for how the other *should* behave or act towards them. Expectations may have been suppressed during the first few years or honeymoon phase. The expectations may be entirely or partially based on the nature of their own parenting or *introjects* from their own parents. While one may accuse the other of intentionality in creating the disturbance, it may likely be attributed to the character structure or unconscious learned personality style of one partner in relationship to the communication style of the other.

As a brief example, a woman may have been raised by an authoritarian father who insisted on respect. When she did not meet his expectation, punitive actions occurred. She was told and *introjected* the message that all men should respect her by catering to her needs. If she were to become involved in a relationship with a liberated male, each time he questions the demands she makes on him for things she can do for herself, or he asks her for a quid pro quo when she requests he do something for her, she becomes angry, breaks off contact, or comes to believe the relationship is a failure. She is living out an unconscious *introject*. In a similar vein, a man was raised with parents who always catered to his every need as if he were a princeling. He becomes intimately involved with a relatively liberated woman. The expectation of her catering to his every need is always in the background. Over time, this expectation is not met. The man is given to bouts of anger when she doesn't cater to him. After a while, the relationship deteriorates into a series of angry interactions and symmetrical one-upsmanships, as in the Albee play, *Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (referenced below). Unless both couples discover the unconscious natures of their mechanical or reflexive behavior and engage in a dialogue about it, the relationship will be added to the divorce statistics.

My personal theory, that anxiety is at the root of all relationship conflict, is informed by the research literature, professional, and personal experience. The anxiety can result from many factors, including sexuality issues or issues with repressed sexuality where one or both partners are inhibited from expressing their true sexual feelings with each other. The sexuality issues are usually a result of belief structures or *introjected* beliefs; the difference between a couple's individual character structures, including inhibitions, unvoiced expectations, sense of entitlement, or criticisms based on parental or cultural *introjects* of how a relationship *should* be, and so forth. Often, the anxiety is a result of characterological issues having little to do with sexuality.

The process of personality development and maturing primarily results from our organism's reaction to the environment. The environment includes significant people (e.g., parents, relatives, teachers, etc.) we relate to from childhood on. Each individual develops a particular character structure. Elements of a particular individual's character structure may clash with another's structure. A common example occurs when one or both partners have unvoiced expectations or beliefs of entitlement. People who live with each other become sensitive to each other. The sensitivity is frequently outside of awareness. The feeling or unvoiced expectation is sensed as anxiety, when in the presence of the other. Over time, the anxiety becomes chronic or predominates the relationship whenever they are together. Repressed feelings, including repressed sexual desire, often leads to anxiety or depression. One partner may feel extremely anxious engaging in any sexual expression outside of the missionary position, or outside of being a passive recipient or mechanical actor. If the other partner engages in a dialogue requesting more assertive activity in their sexuality, the inhibited partner may agree but not change any of their behavior because of the accompanying anxiety. In such instances it will not take long for one or both partners to experience a dulling in their sexuality and development of despair leading towards separation. The differences may simply be cultural, often resolved with a frank discussion.

Recall the opening first chapter's discussion on the communication theory of *symbolic interactionism*. You say something or make a gesture to me (words or gestures are considered symbols). I interpret what you say, based on our past interactions, my own personal history of interactions with others, sometimes going back to childhood; or, based on some judgment or opinion I have of the emotional style or gesture you made to me. In some cases, I interpret what you say based on my own low opinion of myself, imagining what you said to me as criticism or negative (when you never meant it to be). I then respond back to you with my own set of symbols. In the Edward Albee play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, with actors Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, each interprets what the other says and reacts in a symmetrical one-upsmanship. It is worth it to view the entire video of the original movie to understand this toxic pattern leading to destructive relationships.<sup>4,5</sup>

As we know, in the initial stages of a relationship, feelings are generally positive. Following a few years, many couples begin to experience difficulties, arguments inflamed by a sense of self-righteousness (I'm right and your wrong), or previously suppressed judgments, and seeming irreconcilable differences. Yet, between humans, very few issues can be framed as "irreconcilable." Especially between humans who have had positive feelings towards each other, given that both parties are relatively in contact with reality.

What happens then, with two people who, just a few years ago, professed deep and everlasting love for each other, appearing to be in sync with every aspect of their beings?

In the early phase of any evolving relationship, we humans present a certain *persona* or enact a certain role, depending on what we want or are seeking. The ability to utilize different *personas*, differentiates us from other species. With some exceptions, other species know only one mode, authenticity. In people who have come to value authenticity, the *persona* is actually who they really are. Sometimes that authenticity can be irritable to others. The other may personalize their partner's authentic expression, and not understand, accept, or appreciate them for their honesty. Nonetheless, depending on the situation, the *persona* usually varies in degrees from being authentic, and differs from who we actually are.

Most of us begin a relationship with a certain "face," or how we want the other to view us. This can be motivated by our anxiety from lack of confidence. This "face," reinforced by the other's positive reaction to us, endures over time as intimacy develops, to a point. It generally takes a few years of living the "face" or *persona*, before cracks begin to occur. We are constantly interacting with each other, expressing behaviors that others react to based on their own character structures and history. Depending on the nature of the structure of each individual partner, negative issues and behaviors can emerge. The more intimate we become, the more likely it is for the initial positive "face" to recede into the background. Following some years, individuals in a relationship begin to experience who the other person actually is, with all their foibles and short comings. In other words, we shed *personas* as we become more comfortable in the relationship. That we intended to initially put on a "face," may not have been in conscious awareness.

## ***Bad Faith***

We may or may not identify with our *personas*. Identification with the *persona* means it is unconscious. We believe we are the part we are attempting to play to influence the other. People who identify with their *personas* are oftentimes practicing what the existential philosophers and psychologists refer to as *bad faith*. *Bad faith* has nothing to do with religion. *Bad faith* is not conscious lying. *Bad faith* is a form of self-deception. Self-deception necessarily leads to other-deception. Simply put, we deceive ourselves with intellectual arguments. During interactions, we consequently deceive others. Sartre said that *bad faith* is the opposite of sincerity.<sup>6</sup> Illustrating how *bad faith* translates into life experience will be clear after reviewing the following examples.

***Bad faith*** can manifest when a partner, weary from dealing with obstinate children all day, presents himself or herself as cheerful as their paramour arrives home from work. The partner returning home may also have had a horrible day at work but puts their feelings aside. They know, from past experience, that their opposite does not want to hear this on the first contact following work. Both may believe it is their role in the relationship to be cheerful. They suppress or repress their actual feeling as a result of the belief. Both partners are rarely congruent or authentic with their feelings based on personal beliefs or mood. Over time this leads to anxiety in anticipation of the arrival of the partner. When chronic, a depression may develop. The *bad faith* from both partners is the suppression of their true feelings and the presentation of the *persona* of cheerfulness when they meet after work, when neither really feels cheerful. If conscious, resolution may be as simple as an honest discussion of the issue and development of a plan when they meet at the end of the day.

A grade school teacher, having dealt with screaming children all day, becomes angry with their partner when arriving home because the partner, being alone all day, wants to engage in conversation. At one point the teacher may request a period of quiet time when arriving home. But until then, the expressed anger, irritation, or withdrawal, as soon as they come in the door, is characterized as *bad faith*.

As with the first example, consistent expressions of *bad faith* over time, becomes a foundation for anxiety in anticipation of the partner's arrival, or depression as a result of believing one has to hide or suppress one's true feelings to maintain a positive relationship. *Bad faith* is not restricted to denying the qualities which one has or denying the person they are. The *bad faith* is making oneself into something or behaving in some way that is not congruent with one's internal state. The central ethical concept of existentialism, *authenticity*, is at play, here.

In the humanistic psychology movement of the 1960's to the present time, *authenticity* came to be an ideal to strive for, e.g., representing oneself to the world as we are. If sad, be sad. If mad, be mad. If irritated, be irritated. If happy, be happy. If not wanting to share a thought, say so. *Authenticity* has come to be a benchmark in assessing how successful and healthy interpersonal relationships are.<sup>7</sup> The down side of striving for authenticity is the lack of understanding expressed with a partner who reacts negatively and becomes dissatisfied with or ends the relationship as a result of the other partner's commitment to authenticity. I personally experienced this in a number of relationships. Every movement or position in life has its price. My emotional accounting department, however, prefers to continue to strive for authenticity. Given my life experience, while it may be construed as magical thinking, I continue to believe if I remain open to relationships, I may even meet an understanding soul with an equivalent belief and similar striving. Even magical thinking has some scientific support.<sup>8</sup> I've come to accept that authenticity makes me feel better about myself than if I were being patronizing or unconscious of my true nature. I believe in the long run, being authentic is a major step to an enduring, tender relationship. I know couples who have proven this, for many decades.

Sartre provides an illuminating example of *bad faith*. A woman agrees to go out with a man whom she admires for his respectful attitude towards her, but has no thought about other characteristics he presents. She is aware of his amorous intentions from previous contacts. She knows she will be compelled to make a decision, at some point. However, she focuses only on the present, respectful attitudes of the man. She does not want to understand this behavior as a "first approach," leading to a relationship, even though that is what the man communicates, through his behavior. She does not want to realize the urgency of the situation. She does not want to read signs of what he directs to her as anything other than momentary verbal contact and respect which she focuses on. When he says to her, "I find you very attractive," she defuses the expression of its sexuality by focusing only on the objective realization, that she knows she is attractive to most men. The qualities she attributes to the man are only the present expressions of respect and sincerity, which she 'fixes in permanence,' in her mind. She is not aware of her own desire or what she wants. She does not project into the future regarding anything the man says or does. She is aware of the desire she is arousing in the man, but the naked desire would horrify her so she reframes the interpretation of his desire as only an expression of respect. She refuses to acknowledge his desire for what it is. The man then takes her hand. To leave it there and respond would indicate she is receptive to his desire, and is flirting. To withdraw it would risk ending the tenderness and charm of the moment. The object is to postpone the moment for as long as possible. So she decides to leave it there, but is not aware of doing so. She engages in a highly intellectual dialog, divorced from the body, but showing her personality and what she is

intellectually capable of, with her hand remaining inert in his warm hands. This is the expression of *bad faith*. She has disarmed his intentions for what they are, transforming the interaction into an interesting, but intellectual dialogue. But she permits herself to continue to enjoy his desire to the extent that she perceives it as not being what it is. Sartre concludes the example by saying that "...while sensing, profoundly, the presence of her own body---to the degree of being disturbed, perhaps---she realizes herself as not being her own body and she contemplates it as if from above as a passive object." The *bad faith* is the fact that she is denying what is, and denying her own feelings, perhaps to cover for her own ambivalence. *Good faith* in such a situation would be to tell the man that she realizes his attraction to her, but she is confused about what she wants and does not know how to respond without putting him off, even though she does enjoy their interaction and his expression of authentic feeling.<sup>9</sup> Once the contact is ended, if the sincere man realizes he was played along with rather than being related to with honesty, it is not difficult to discern what his mood will be.

Relationships that have evolved over a period of time provide fertile grounds for expressions of *bad faith*. One person has had a life-long ambivalence of engaging in a committed relationship, even though she was married for years and had two adult children. She was ambivalent about marrying her husband until he threatened to end the relationship. This is a result of an early childhood trauma that has slipped out of consciousness. When married for many years, she suppressed her ambivalence. Now, having been separated and caring for two adolescent children, she has a fortuitous meeting with a man. The man asks about her relationship status. She says she is divorced, correctly perceiving the man would not pursue the relationship if she were married, as they have shared enough to know the man would probably be ethical in such a situation. The relationship proceeds for many months. The couple became intimate with each other. Once, while at her house, she opens some mail expressing surprise. The man asks what it is. She says it's her final divorce papers. The man recalls her telling him she was divorced when they met. He expresses irritation at being deceived by her. She cleverly appeals to his emotions saying that she was attracted to him and didn't want to turn him off by saying she was still married...that she had, in fact, just filed for divorce around the time they first met. Though, now suspicious of her honesty, the man accepts her apology. A number of years go by. As they were growing increasingly closer, the man broached the subject of her ambivalence, as he was concerned if it would apply to their relationship. She minimized it and changed the subject. Their relationship had been generally positive. During a vacation, the two partners begin discussing how nice it would be to retire together, in the vacation spot. The retirement dialog continues for a few more years. They investigate housing prices at the vacation spot. As the year of retirement approaches, she begins to withdraw from the relationship. The man becomes increasingly earnest at the possibility of them sharing a life together, in retirement. This continues to the point where the man questions her withdrawal. The woman ends the relationship saying, 'I can't do this anymore.' What she cannot do is proceed to fulfill their plans together, given the unresolved ambivalence and constant anxiety. She has practiced *bad faith*. The *bad faith* was, first, in the initial statement years before, when they first met and she told him she was divorced, when she was not. Then as years proceeded, she made light of her ambivalence and exhibited a reluctance to discuss it, or denied it when brought up by the man. The man was drawn into the long term plans, as a result of the pretense the partner exhibited. The man feels dejected and in despair, at this point, having sustained the relationship as a result of the woman's pretense, for the better part of a decade.

In a clearer example, after some years in a relationship, one partner asks the other to marry him. The woman agrees, but demands that the man, who is generally talkative about emotional aspects, not discuss the marriage until the marriage date approaches. The man respects that request because he is aware of his own tendency to elaborate on issues. The month before the agreed upon date, the man asks the woman, “well, how are we going to do this...get married.” The woman says, “what are you talking about?” The man, dumbfounded at this point, refers her back to the conversation they had about their marriage, a year ago. He also indicated he invited his good friends to travel from another country and stay with them for the wedding. She hesitates before formulating a response and says, “I never agreed to marry you...I was only saying that to stop you from bugging me.” At that point, the man felt deceived and undermined. For he was clearly aware he had not “bugged” her about it over the year, nor did he “bug” her to marry him other than the initial request when she agreed. As proof, he asks her to call their friends in the other country and ask what they were intending to do next month...and when they had been told of the plans. She refuses, claiming she doesn’t know them that well, and creates another reason, based on recent arguments, having nothing to do with her initial acceptance of the proposal. The woman exhibited *bad faith* with the man, regardless of what transpired during the year, as she never did discuss her change of mind, if she actually did change. Nor did she honestly acknowledge initially agreeing to the marriage, even if she did not intend to follow through.

*Bad faith* often exists in the context of a family. The father wanted to delay having a child. He had fantasies of having a female child. A male child is born. Over the course of the male child’s life, the father related to him with physical, psychological, and/or verbal abuse when he either had difficulty learning what the father wanted to teach him or did not comply with the father’s demands. The mother saw this occurring, but said nothing because she did not want to disturb the relationship with her husband. Both parents were practicing *bad faith*. The child, though resilient, came to be an adult with a mild depression and extensive difficulty in selecting a partner. Most of his selections were people who were abusive, deceptive, or ambivalent. The selected partners generally practiced a significant amount of their own *bad faith*, in many interactions.

Flirting behavior is a common ground for *bad faith*. People flirt as a result of genuine desire to make contact and develop a relationship. This is not *bad faith*. When an individual flirts or responds to another’s flirting when they have no intention to become involved or pursue any contact outside of the momentary flirting, the expression is defined as *bad faith*.

In another example, a man and woman are married. Within months, the man begins coming home very late from work. He tells the woman he is overburdened with work. She accepts this. He continues to “work late.” One evening she and her friends go out to eat. She notices the man in a dark corner of the restaurant with a woman. She goes over to confront him. He says she is one of his work colleagues and they decided to finish their work at the restaurant. He has actually been having an affair with the woman. While this can be construed as an outright deception and lie, it also can be defined as *bad faith*. Given the possibility of STD transmission, it is also dangerous.

*Bad faith* frequently occurs in work situations. The employer may want to dismiss an employee because of a personal dislike, but realizes the union rules will not permit this. He subsequently relates to the employee, negatively and critically, in most interactions. The employee asks why he is being so criticized, as he believes he is exceeding the job duties. The employer creates a reason that has nothing to do with job performance, but insists this is why he is dissatisfied with the employee. The employer is hoping the negative work environment would



force the employee to resign. The *bad faith* is the employer's lack of sincerity in not telling the employee of his personal dislike that has nothing to do with work performance.

In a similar work situation, an employer is uncomfortable around a specific employee, for unknown reasons. The employer is generally negative with the employee, regardless of how effective he is. The employee believes their supervisor is relating to them in an unreasonable fashion. Other employees have also noticed the unreasonable actions of the supervisor and commented to the employee. The supervisor exploits any actions of the employee to criticize him, reasonable or not. The *bad faith* is in the supervisor never stating the reasons for their dislike, if aware. Or if unaware, never exploring their relationship or personal discomfort with the employee, or doing some introspection and exploring it within themselves. *Bad faith* always includes elements of personal responsibility.

In the classroom, a teacher or professor may have a personal dislike of a particular student and lower their grade, claiming they are not performing up to the expected standard (when, in fact, they are). The professor may be barely conscious or unaware of his personal dislike. The *bad faith*, from the professor's standpoint, is in never being thoughtful and exploring personal reasons for their dislike, or discussing it with the student, especially when the student did not merit the lowered grade.

In a similar classroom situation, a professor is aware of a student's impoverished upbringing and has sympathy for her deficiency in grammar. The professor, without mentioning it, consistently gives the student a grade higher than was indicated by their performance. The *bad faith* is in not discussing the sympathetic reasons for the higher grade or a request that the student undertake some remedial grammar instruction. In this situation, the student may likely develop an inflated opinion of their abilities without ever making an effort to correct the deficiency.

Another classroom situation involves a self-centered student having an inflated opinion of himself. The student only does the minimal requirements. The teacher, appropriately, gives him a grade of C. The student files a formal protest and demands a higher grade. The student contacts the teacher's supervisor and complains of being maltreated. The teacher explains, with data, that the student did not perform to the standard demanding a higher grade. The teacher's supervisor strongly urges the teacher to upgrade the student, to calm the situation, but without explaining the reasons to do so. The supervisor says they know the student is capable of better than C work. The teacher complies and upgrades the student, after an argument to the contrary is dropped, as she is concerned about maintaining her job. This represents a triple dose of *bad faith*. The student's demand, based on the unreasonable personal opinion of himself is *bad faith*. The teacher's supervisor's pressure to upgrade the student so they don't have to deal with other actions, including a lawsuit from the student, without informing the teacher of the specific reasons, is a second example of *bad faith*. The teacher complying with the subtle pressure from their supervisor is a third example of *bad faith*. The results are pretty clear. The student will not have their inflation confronted. In fact, it will be reinforced. This inflation will likely persist in the student's life, or persist until others having good faith and sincerity confront the student. The professor will likely feel she compromised her own integrity. If she doesn't seek another position and remains at the school where her integrity has been compromised, especially if she suppresses or puts aside the issue of her integrity, is another issue meeting the criteria of *bad faith*.

Authenticity is a relevant factor affecting feeling and mood in many different relationships. In an intimate relationship, lack of authenticity can lead one or both partners to manifest chronic anxiety and/or depression with time. If one feels they must consistently relate in ways other than what they feel with partners, the likelihood of anxiety arising is high, whenever the individual

anticipates the presence of the other partner or, is in contact with the other partner or, whenever the partner questions the authenticity of the individual practicing *bad faith*. As years go by, a despair may overtake the feeling tone in the relationship, or a mild depression may set in outside of awareness. There is something about consistent relating to an intimate other, in an inauthentic fashion, that can lead to a dull depressing atmosphere with both partners.

Character structure, briefly mentioned above, is often a factor in the manifestation of anxiety and depression within relationships. The character is formed by interactions with significant people in one's life, from birth onward. Without getting too far into the dynamics of character structure, consider that a person with an aggressive, assertive character structure becomes attracted to a relatively non-judgmental person who has learned to accept most people in life for what they are. She or he happens to be attracted to aggressive people who can easily articulate what they want in life. Over the course of the relationship, the aggressive character, whether they be male or female, comes to believe that their partner would benefit in life from becoming more assertive and demanding of their environment. The aggressive partner begins to emphasize this, requesting the other to become more assertive in their sexuality with each other, in social situations, and work relationships. The assertive character continues to make these requests. The accepting person agrees, on the surface, but does not change and continues to accept whatever happens, in sexuality and in their social interactions. The partner's expectation is always in the background of consciousness. Over the course of the evolving relationship the accepting individual begins to develop anxiety during sexual contacts, in social, or work situations where they could be assertive. The anxiety increases and pervades the accepting individual's life. He or she becomes anxious whenever the possibility of their sexuality is imminent. He or she begins to misinterpret the anxiety as resulting from a lack of desire. Unfortunately, the accepting character takes their misinterpretation to the next step and asserts him or herself in an action ending the relationship.

Consider an enduring relationship where one or both partners suppressed or repressed their critical judgments of the other for many years. We frequently come to make judgments based on forgotten expectations from our own parents or, out of the individual character we developed from the relationship with significant others. If a woman, having either an authoritarian or doting parent(s) who dictated or subtly communicated the qualities of the person she should be involved with, gets involved with a man having opposite qualities, it's a matter of time before these issues cloud any intimacy, especially if the parent's demands have been relegated to the woman's unconscious. The same for a man having an authoritarian or doting parent(s) who dictated or subtly communicated the qualities of the woman he should be involved with. He gets involved with an individual having opposite qualities. This begs the question of how long these relationships will proceed in a positive direction, before criticism or negativity erupts. The more unconscious the individuals are, concerning the nature of their expectations, the more likely negativity will occur.

We were all raised with different beliefs. These beliefs represent variations on many different themes, created by our parents whose beliefs were formed from interactions with and *introjects* from their own parents, and so on.

*Introjection* is a mental process whereby we uncritically take in beliefs, descriptions of reality, etc., from others, religious figures or practices, or other authority figures, often without examining them to ascertain if they are compatible with our own personal belief system,

perceptions, or approach to life. In *introjection*, to use a food analogy, we swallow whole, messages or directives that were meant to be chewed up and digested. In other words, we receive a message like ‘a penny saved is a penny earned’ and rather than take the positive suggestion to create a savings account, we become stingy and hoard everything we earn. Our actions are then being *controlled* by the undigested, *introjected* belief, rather than accepting the metaphor as a learning lesson about savings as it was meant to be. *Introjects* are signified by beliefs or personal demands that we think we *should* or *should not* behave in this or that way. The process of being controlled by the dictates of the *introject* rather than the exercise of our will and personal choice is often unconscious and becomes our reflexive mode of thinking and behavior. Most of us have introjected or swallowed whole a good portion of the beliefs and behaviors of those who raised us. For most people, the process is not conscious. The degree to which we manifest *introjects* in our behavior is relevant to interpersonal relationships, anxiety, and the development of depression.<sup>10</sup>

For example, say a son is raised by a bitter, seclusive, physically or psychologically abusive, and depressed, but fiscally responsible father. As the son grows to have his own family, he might become a fiscally responsible man, but become a father who related to his children with a coldness and lack of emotion, unless angry. A telling aspect is that he believes he has positive intentions to raise his children, different from his own abusive upbringing. During angry episodes he would become emotionally and psychologically abusive with his spouse and/or children, to suppress or repress his own anxiety about having to confront the same situation he was confronted with in his own childhood. As adults, we often unconsciously model the same behavior our parents exhibited towards us when we were children. While he fulfilled his duty as a breadwinner and a father, he would appear bored and detached when relating to his children. The man had *introjected* some of the characteristics of his own apparently disturbed father, including a diminished interest in the pleasures family life can provide.

In another example, typical in strictly religious families and religious cultures, a woman meets a man. Their erotic feelings grow for each other. After a while the woman agrees to sleep with the man. She becomes extremely anxious and cannot experience pleasure as a result of the *introjected* belief of the sinfulness of sex outside of marriage. Even in marriage, it is likely her sexuality will be inhibited, given the strength of the *introject* against sexuality. If the person is particularly fragile, sexuality can precipitate a break with reality. Similarly, a man from a strictly religious background who *introjected* the beliefs about sexuality, may likely experience impotence in such a situation. The impotence may continue even after marriage. Such situations can result in long term despair at ever being able to develop a successful relationship, or a break with reality, given the man's emotional fragility.

The consequences of *introjected* beliefs can indeed be severe. *Introjected* beliefs can interfere with us becoming differentiated human beings, separate from our parents or the significant others who raised us. In other words, unconscious *introjects* – beliefs or behaviors – can function as barriers to fulfilling our potential as unique human beings.

We will see how to rid ourselves of the *introjects* or *shoulds* and *shouldn'ts* that interfere with our experience of pleasure and the full development of our potential as human beings, in the next exercise.

Forgive the repetition, but it is important to stress the understanding that *introjects* are messages we have received from parents or others who are significant in our lives. Messages like “You should honor your father and mother” (regardless of how mean, sadistic, cruel, or indifferent they are). What is implicit in such a message is that we shall continue to relate to our

parents as if they are deserving of honor and respect, simply because they gave birth to us. They might say that they punished us by beating ‘only to control us so that we didn’t end up as a criminal,’ or some such rationalization for their bad behavior. Similarly, “you should never disrespect your elders.” This, of course, implies that regardless of how sadistic and cruel someone is to you, just because they happened to be born before you, you should accept their cruelty as they must be trying to teach you something, and should never disrespect them by speaking out against them, confronting, or criticizing them for their bad behavior. A controlling *introject* to say the least. Introjects, in one real sense, imprison us. Imagine how it might feel if all freedom to be spontaneous and exercise your personal choice is taken away.

Suicide is a very real problem in prisons and jails, far above the rate for the non-jail population. While it might be theorized that prison and jail suicides are a result of long incarcerations, more than 50% of prison suicides occur within the first week of incarceration.<sup>11</sup> *Introjected* beliefs may be at the root of much despair where individuals believe life has not turned out like it *should* have.

Later in life, *shoulds* transfer to most people in authority or to those whom we look towards as sources of emotional nourishment, regardless of how they treat us. It manifests in different ways, often resulting in conflict with couples or a parent creating conflict with the child, merely because the child asserts themselves.

Child and adolescent abuse often leads to depressed and anxious adults.<sup>12</sup> Most people who experience serious problems in life or in relationships, problems with shyness, difficulty in approaching others, and confronting partners, have likely experienced abuse or neglect, physically, psychologically, and/or emotionally by someone significant in their childhood. A skeptic might ask, how can an event, that happens in early childhood, lead to depression or anxiety as an adult, especially since most people have only vague memories of child hood events? It is the remembered *feeling tone*, not necessarily the event or circumstance. The *feeling tone* is experienced or represented in different ways, based on one’s focus, perceptual, and cognitive orientation. The *feeling tone* is what moves us to feel swelling emotion, joy, or tears when viewing a great work of art, a beautiful scene in nature, hearing a specific piece of music, or experiencing a memory reminding us of a tragedy or a pleasurable experience. Emotionally focused individuals primarily represent remembered experience kinesthetically or in feelings. These individuals may experience a *feeling tone* from a child hood memory of abuse. The memory may have been stimulated by a feeling when watching an abusive incident, a phrase, picture, place, or other event encountered as an adult, similar to the original moment of abuse. While the actual abuse may not be recalled, the *feeling tone* is experienced as a vague sense of dread, dark or blue feeling, oppressive or depressing emotion, or vague anxiety. One who is highly verbal might experience a child hood *feeling tone*, from a distant memory, as a thought. While one who is visually oriented may experience a child hood memory as a visual image of the scene.

Consider a child who is subject to occasional emotional and psychological abuse (mainly by a parent, lacking interpersonal skills, who yells at and threatens the child to control him). One episode of the father yelling at the child because he did not want to leave a particular place occurred when the family was vacationing at a camping site at a mountain lake. The child, now an adult in his 60’s, with a history of his own interpersonal relationship difficulties, happily lives alone. One day, an artist posts a link to drawings and photos of this particular mountain lake on the man’s facebook page. He clicks on the link and scrolls through these drawings and photos,

coming across a series of photos of the lake where his family vacationed when he was a young child. Initially, he only recalls the name of the lake and vaguely recalls what the lake looked like, but is unsure if he ever saw the lake from that particular viewpoint in the photo. But, each time he looks at the photos, a vague sense of unease emerges leaving him feeling moody for the next few hours. It is the *feeling tone* from that oppressive moment in childhood where he then reacted with anxiety when being yelled at, that contributes to his current moodiness. He may have completely forgotten the details of the actual abusive incident.

**E**motional abuse takes many subtle forms, too numerous to detail here. Not to mention that the term “abuse” is sometimes used to characterize non-abusive situations, usually by people who have learned, as children, they can do no wrong. They have the “perfect childhood.” In adult relationship situations, where anger tinged arguments occasionally erupt, the partner with the “perfect childhood” might fling the accusation of abuse at the other, rather than make a rational counter argument or engage in a constructive dialogue. Can anxiety be a factor in a relationship with someone who had the “perfect childhood?” Indeed!

Children are frequently and repeatedly told that they *should* be a certain way in the world e.g., put on a certain mask for those around them, to “get ahead” or “make money” or go to a certain school or series of schools rather than the public schools.<sup>13</sup> That *should* e.g., ‘you *should* go to an exclusive or Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Christian, etc. school ‘as private education is better,’ is based on no science and has been proven false. Nevertheless, that *should* is frequently accompanied by parental threats: ‘either you go to school X or we won’t give you any spending money or support.’ Even physical threats and emotional abuse if a child were to insist on wanting to go to the school where their friends are attending. Think of how it might feel if you were forced to go to an exclusive school, away from all your dear friends? Making that personal choice is an entirely different matter, than if one were threatened or forced into it.

Another such *introject* is “turn the other cheek.” This implies that we should not defend ourselves when attacked. We should just offer our other cheek for the attacker to strike, and swallow the pain and suffering the attack entails. Consider how such a posture can cause anxiety and depression, especially if the *introject* is outside of our awareness.

Differing styles of parent-child relationships and parental dictates result in the development of specific character structures. The character structure, in effect, is the biophysical reaction of an individual to varying degrees of non-nurturing, toxic, negativistic, unemotional, cold or distant contact. Sometimes, a child experiences a parent as only half there or not emotionally there with them, but focused on something else. If repetitive, this can have a clear effect on the child’s self esteem or development of depression in childhood or later in life, or how they deal with anxiety as they grow into adulthood. The deficiency of nurturance and positive feeling from significant figures in childhood is manifested in a negative *feeling tone* when remotely similar situations arise. This often leads to negative self-perception or low self-esteem, as an adult.

A teacher or coach may harshly criticize a child who is either younger than his classmates or is slightly developmentally delayed and can’t perform the coordinated activities as his or her peers. The parents agree with the teacher or coach that the child is not welcome or capable in the sport, without first determining the circumstances, even when the child tells of his honest appraisal of the incident.

The coach may express anger and embarrass a child in front of his peers; a child whose coordination has yet to mature. I’ll share a personal example from my own high school years. We had just moved from a distant city where all my childhood friends were. I had no friends in the new city. I was really excited to try out for the high school crew, rowing in an eight person

shell. I was especially excited, since some kids I recently befriended, were in the crew. I loved water sports. As a result of my birth date, I was younger and started school earlier than most kids in my class, as my working parents convinced the school to permit me to begin kindergarten early. I was not as coordinated as a kid 12 months older. Thus, I occasionally feathered the oar out of synchrony with the other crew, caught a crab (kept my oar in the water out of synchrony with the rest of the crew) and the boat jerked. Six months later I might have likely developed that coordination. Six month's too late to avoid this incident. The coach angrily screamed at me to get out of the boat. I sat there knowing that the river current was too strong to swim to shore. I sat there with the oar across my lap and was rowed to the dock with the coach screaming insults that I interrupted the practice. I sat in the empty boat house and cried my eyes out...and then left to walk home before the crew was finished. I told my parents. They talked to the coach and gave me a general response that maybe it was best. The insult from the coaches action, my parents disingenuousness, lack of explanation, and lack of support affected my self-esteem for the rest of my life, in varying degrees, especially in competitive group situations, albeit unconscious. My self esteem was affected, even to this day, when it comes to physical activities. I had introjected the coach's irrational criticism, especially in light of my parent's lack of explanation of my physical abilities and support. Watching this year's Olympic rowing events, called up the oppression and sadness I felt at that time as a teenager, 50 years ago. The Olympic events acted as a stimulus to call up the anchor of that *feeling tone* from half a century ago.

“You should associate with your own kind; people of other races or ethnicity are inferior to yours or, not to be trusted,” is a common *introject*. That, in a nutshell, was the *introject* that Adolf Hitler and his gang forced down the throat of the German people. In this country, the *white supremacy* introject is at the basis of most racism and racist policies. It is the cause of all ethnic strife, racism, and the foundation of the policies that enslaved African's and African-American's in this country, preventing their progress and development as a group of people, even after Federal laws were passed outlawing such discrimination. Even today, the hidden agenda's behind the debates against Affirmative Action, Immigration Reform or Equal Opportunity, and voter I.D. laws are influenced by those having *introjected* this racial superiority–inferiority message, or fearing the rise in political power of racial groups. The *white supremacy* introject is most often based on fear of loss of white control in an emerging multicultural society. Yet, they are likely not conscious of the reasons for their divisiveness. “Look at the technology that we produced and compare it to the technology they produced in Africa (or Mexico, etc.) and you can see who is superior,” is one of the rationalizations used for superiority. Or, “we're protecting voting rights by preventing fraudulent voting,” when the evidence of voting fraud is miniscule or non-existent in states that pass these voter I.D. laws. At least one former Florida party chair verbalized, in an interview, that they are promoting the voter I.D. laws to suppress minority voting.<sup>14</sup>

We have short historical memories. Only after the passing of Affirmative Action legislation, did we see African-Americans gain in economic independence and increase their representation in the middle class. Prior to that, American civilization suppressed, enslaved, segregated, and prevented African-Americans from educational opportunities. This was an almost universal practice, in some regions, well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. There is documented evidence of black slavery in existence in Southern institutions, as late as 1948.<sup>15</sup> These short historical memories and the emergence of the recent debates against continuing Affirmative Action or implementing voter I.D. laws, with no subsequent policy implementation to insure the prevention of racial discrimination, indicate the power of an *introject* to perpetuate itself from generation to

generation. Racial and cultural discrimination provides a foundation for depression and anxiety in those discriminated against.<sup>16</sup>

A fifth such *introject* is: “be a good girl (or boy) and you’ll get (ahead, gifts, mother’s and father’s love, etc.)” Or, “you should be a good boy (or girl), at all times.” This implies a realm of conflicting interactions. Being a “good-boy” or “good-girl” entails putting on a certain *persona* or mask, in every interaction. “Good-girls” and “good-boys” often become successful adults in our society, but with a severe price. “Good-boys” and “good-girls” learn, early on, to only show that part of themselves that they think others will approve of. In so doing, they stunt the growth of their personality, often only consciously recognizing one side of themselves, the “good-boy” or “good-girl” side. They rarely, if ever become aware of their dark side. Consider this also as another expression of *bad faith*.

Some of these “good-boys” and “good-girls” become self-righteous adults who vehemently oppose anything that is inconsistent with their moral *introjects*, to the point of murdering innocent people to support their beliefs. To wit, the recent murders of the physicians and staff members who worked at abortion clinics, the bombing of the Federal building in Oklahoma, or some government sponsored military actions.

“Good-boys” and “good-girls,” in business, are usually found to be doing the proverbial stabbing of others in the back to get ahead. They must maintain their *persona* (mask) of excellence, at all costs.

Other *introjects* act as positive metaphors assisting us through life. “Look before you leap.” “A penny saved is a penny earned.” “Honesty is the best policy,” are some of the more positive *introjects* that function to assist us as we grow and develop in western society.

These are only some of the many common *introjects* most people have accepted, in total, without examining them. Rather than using what part fits and can benefit or enhance their own individual development while discarding the parts that feel alien, the message or *introject* is swallowed whole, without self-examination.

## ***How to Regurgitate Introjects***

If you are bothered by feeling compelled to act in an automatic fashion, in certain circumstances often against your desire, or you wish you could say what’s on your mind but feel blocked from doing so with certain people or circumstances, the following exercise might help. You are about to engage a form of mindfulness and personal work. This exercise or learning experiment requires you to be ruthlessly honest with yourself and examine the minute details of how you are in the world. It is divided into 3 stages.

### ***Stage 1***

**Make a list of all the relationships that you have had or currently have that cause strife or discomfort, but which you continue to engage in. Include parents, siblings, relatives and friends. On occasion, you even attempted, but failed to come to terms with the discomfort so that it was resolved. These are relationships where there were periods of conflict or differences that have never seemed to resolve, except from separation, leaving the scene, or ending the relationship. Think about the circumstances surrounding each listing for a few minutes or so.**

**Make another list of repetitive behaviors that you do in certain situations. The specific way you behave and/or speak or carefully check yourself and withhold from speaking in a certain way with particular people or with people who represent a class of people, e.g., authorities, teachers, professors, students, parents, relatives, friends, your friend's spouse or partner, religious figures, your own or other's children, groups defined by sex, race, spiritual beliefs, physical structure, occupational status, or other divisive way. Contemplate the circumstances related to each listing for a few minutes.**

Most sex-based, racial or religious prejudice and/or discrimination clearly originate from a set of *introjects* having to do with "perceived" inferiority of the other group. This is how people in civilization maintain positions of superiority over others. It is solely through their perception of themselves relative to the others. Perceptions, as we know, do not necessarily reflect reality.

**Make a third list of customs or ritual behaviors you continue to follow, regardless of the situation. For example, when you have guests over, even if they are your best friends, you frantically run around and clean the house or specific rooms of the house. Or, you feel bad if you don't have the money to have the refrigerator stocked with good food or drink. Or, when you go into certain rooms of the house, places in the community, or offices in your workplace, you lower your voice and/or speak in a certain way or make certain gestures. Or when you see people dressed in particular ways, or of particular racial groups, walking towards you, you cross the street to the other side, or begin to feel anxious. Think about the circumstances with each item on this list for a few minutes.**

**Make a final list of the specific situations in which you experienced bad or guilty feelings after failing to act or speak up; or, you feel guilty or regret that you did speak up. For example, you give a gift or do a service for another and they do not express gratitude or thanks, as if it was your duty to give the gift or service. You say nothing but regret at least not commenting after the event. If someone unreasonably criticizes you based on their incorrect assumption about what you did, you regret not speaking up or correcting them; or, if you did speak up, you regret that you did.**

## ***Stage 2***

**Sit back in a comfortable chair with your four lists in front of you and relax. Take 10 deep breaths and exhale completely after each breath.**

**Choose each item from the lists, one at a time. Close your eyes. Imagine yourself spiraling back to a place and time where you were told or the demand was made on you that you *should* act or not act in that way, or relate to certain individuals or groups in a certain way. Let your mind create an image, including feelings and sounds of that time. If you can't seem to recall**



a specific time, imagine or create a related image. Be creative. Design your image to reflect some of the elements or relationships of that time, relating to the present situation. Yes, make it up. Creating an image, while focusing on a forgotten event, often mirrors elements of the previously unconscious or forgotten event. While the image is not exactly what happened, the *feeling tone*, is what you are after. Design the image to reflect the feeling tone or how you feel by feeling compelled to act or not act in a specific way.

In the case of hanging onto relationships with abusive or dishonest people you may have messages come to mind like: “You should cherish all your friendships, as life is short.” Or, “good friends are few and far between.” Or, “never say goodbye to someone who is a friend.” Or “once in love, always in love,” etc. Bring the early message into full consciousness.

Now, imagine that you have no preconceived notions, *shoulds* or *shouldn'ts*. If it helps, imagine you are from another galaxy where such notions are alien.

Look at your behavior lists from that perspective, free of preconceived notions. What would you do, given this new situation? For example, if you recalled the message “never say goodbye to someone who is a friend or intimate partner,” imagine what you would do without that directive, if one of your friends were consistently demeaning or disrespectful. Even your spouse.

If you spotlessly clean the house, even when your best friends are coming over, after attempting to identify the origin of the original should so that it is in awareness, you might feel more relaxed and not so pressured, as it will be what you want to do, rather than what you feel compelled to do.

Many couples suffer unnecessarily, as a result of an *introject* akin to ‘until death do us part.’ One partner is constantly critical and demeaning. Nothing, even consulting with a therapist, seems to have resolved the problem of criticality and demeaning comments. The other partner grits their teeth and bears it for a lifetime of misery.

Make a list of possible spontaneous actions, rather than what you did do or usually do. The new spontaneous action is what you would do if the ‘*should*’ or *introject* was absent. Do this for each item on your four lists.

### *Stage 3*

After deciding what you would now do spontaneously, for each item on your lists, contemplate the contrast between what your spontaneous action is and what you originally did for each action. How do you imagine feeling about the outcome for each new spontaneous action? What do you imagine the outcome would be for the relationship: for your personal feeling of integrity, for other’s perception of your integrity? Is the new spontaneous action more relaxing or more refreshing?

**Analyze each interaction and choose those behaviors that are consistent with your beliefs AND would make you feel good, comfortable, free of anxiety, free of regret, or complete. The behavior must not be the original one, although it may incorporate parts of the original one. For the original one was most probably driven by an *introject*.**

The goal we are seeking here is some variation of the original one incorporating what makes you most comfortable, free from control by the *introject*.

Set aside about 15 minutes each week, for the next few months, to identify new lists of *introjects* and utilize the three-stage change procedure to work them through so that you have replaced the automatic behavior with your own true preference. Rehearse or practice the changed responses in imagination or at every opportunity in reality. After a while, you will come to immediately recognize if any of your behaviors are governed by *introjected* messages.

As a caveat, be especially careful of those changed responses that might have the potential to cause emotional pain in others. With those responses, it would help if you were to adopt a new positive and conscious *introject* of gauging the potential effect of your response based on the potential of causing emotional pain in others. If your sense is that the response would cause pain, either do not respond or seek another response that would not create emotional pain, but one that still accomplishes your intention.

**K**nowledge of *introjects*, in addition to eliminating the possibility of *bad faith* interactions with others, enhances our awareness and interpersonal spontaneity. We relate to others, as we are, authentically, not pretending to be something or someone that we're not, either consciously or unconsciously.

One key to eliminating the development of depression and anxiety within relationships is to dedicate oneself to practice authenticity. Always be on guard for any lingering *introjects* that may govern behavior towards others. But, do so by embracing the *introject* of respect for other's personal space and feelings. We can certainly relate authentically and be devoid of *introjects* with a degree of kindness, sensitivity, and diplomacy.

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