**The Intersection of Vajrayana Buddhism and Hakomi Experiential Psychotherapy**

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As an agent of change, a good therapist is a trustworthy guide on the path of self-realization. Touching deep inside where unconscious shadows reside, this hidden inner terrain can be frightening yet it is the place where metamorphosis occurs. Buddhism and Hakomi Experiential Psychotherapy offer powerful tools in service of the transformative journey. Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche describes the foundation that modern day alchemists need in order to help others.

The basic work of health professionals in general and of psychotherapists in particular, is to become full human beings and inspire full human beingness in other people who feel starved about their lives. When we say full human being we mean a person who not only eats, sleeps, walks and talks but a person who also experiences a basic state of wakefulness. It might seem very demanding to define health in terms of wakefulness but wakefulness is actually very close to us. We can experience it,in fact we are touching it all the time. (2005, p.137)

Therapy is a system to transmit love, care, wisdom, and education. Tattered in the fabric of contemporary society, these principles need to be cultivated. Neither spiritual nor religious, the secular aspect of therapy appeals to a diverse strata of Western society. We all have the capacity to transform and those who consciously cultivate awareness in their lives, inspire others to do the same.

When a log that has only just started to burn is placed next to one burning fiercely, and after a while they are separated again, the first log will be burning with much greater intensity. After all, it is the same fire. To be such a fire is one of the functions of a spiritual teacher. Some therapists may also be able to fulfill that function, provided they have gone beyond the level of mind and can create and sustain a state of intense conscious presence while they are working with you. (Tolle, 1999, pp. 34 - 35)

Therapists, spiritual teachers, and healers are agents of internal change, establishing a foundation for external change to occur. Although basic goodness is inherent in all beings, it must be recognized and cared for in order to flourish. Similar to feisty plants that tenaciously grow through cracks in the sidewalk, our nature is to grow. Given water, good soil, proper light, and food, plants can achieve their full potential

**Hakomi Psychotherapy and Buddhism as Complimentary Modalities**

When consulting Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche regarding how to practice therapeutic disciplines and remain true to Buddhist principles, Rinpoche said the most important point is the view. The view, he said: “is understanding the inherent emptiness of phenomena, cultivating compassion, wisdom… things like that.” He added Buddhism need not be mentioned when working with clients, but holding the view is crucial. The view provides continuity of wisdom passed down from the succession of lineage masters and remains a powerful, unbroken transmission from teacher to student.

In *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*, Trungpa Rinpoche describes the first teachings of Buddha known as the Four Noble Truths. The first truth states human existence is suffering and by trying to escape pain we create more. The second truth is that the origin of suffering is knowable by looking directly at the source, which lies within ourselves. The third truth says suffering can be transformed and cessation is possible, and the fourth truth states in order to do this, one needs a path. Buddhist wisdom is a living lineage and has passed from directly from teacher to student for thousands of years.

Hakomi and Buddhism both use the body as a vehicle for discovery, depending on the type of Buddhism. *In Introduction to Tantra,* Lama Yeshe explains the functions of the body’s energetic inner channels. On a Vajrayana level, Buddhism relates to the inner body, sense perceptions, emotions, and cognition. Other schools would not use the body in the same way. For example Sutrayana Buddhism renounces emotions through strict meditative discipline. Mahayana Buddhism befriends emotions viewing them as empty and simply a product of mind. Vajrayana Buddhism doesn’t try to pacify or remove emotions. Instead the Vajrayana utilizes the raw energy of emotions. During the 2004 *Words of My Perfect Teacher* seminar in San Francisco, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche explained: “One hundred emotions, one hundred wisdoms; one thousand emotions, one thousand wisdoms.” He told an antidote about a war between Fire and Wood. A scout for Fire said many troops of Wood were on the way. The captain of the Fire was delighted, replying: “Good, the more of them, the more of us.” Emotions are like firewood. Just as wood fuels fire, emotions have the potential to fuel transformative experiences.

“When we become angry, we normally tend to react in a strong way, with the thought, “Oh I am angry and we tend to panic. If, instead of doing that, you look directly at the anger and you try to find the anger- exactly where the anger is and whether or not it has any substantial characteristics – this can help a great deal. For example, you say, “Well, I’m angry. Exactly what is this anger? Where is it? Is it inside my body or outside my body?” (Thrangu, 2000, p. 23).

Without judging emotions as good or bad, the Vajrayana Buddhist approach is similar to Hakomi where emotions are used as an entry into the psyche.

…touching emotions as doorways to discovery: we are not interested in deep emotions or catharsis… we just want to touch significant emotions in order to discover the congruent thoughts, memories, ideas, beliefs, and organizing material… when deep emotions happen, we simply offer comfort and support the person to stay present, and to come gently back to a state from which we can make the discoveries we need in order to find out the root of the suffering and exactly what kind of nourishment is needed. (Martin, 2007)

In Hakomi Psychotherapy core material, the deep, unconscious beliefs that organize an individual’s behavior, are also accessed through inner body sensations, five sense perceptions, movement of the body ie: gestures, affective states ie: emotions, and cognition. (Ogden, 2007, p. 5)

Vajrayana uses the breath or wind, inner channels (ie: the energetic channels that the breath/life energy moves through), and chakras or energy centers within the body. Visualization and mantra or sound, are methods used to purify and work with energetic aspects of the body.

...it will be important to mention the central channel (avadhuti or shushuma) at least briefly because it is of particular importance. The channel runs in a straight line from the crown of our head to an area in front of the base of our spine, and along it are several focal points known as chakras, or energy wheels. Each one serves a different function in the practice of tantra [Vajrayana is the path of tantra]… The most important chakra, however, is the one located at the level of the heart, for the heart chakra is the home of our very subtle mind: the priceless treasure of all tantric practitioners. This very subtle mind has been with us from conception; in fact, together with its supporting energy wind, the continuum of this mind has been with us for lifetimes. (Yeshe, 2000, p. 100).

A Hakomi therapist, Cedar Barstow, addressed the differences and similarities of Hakomi and Buddhism. She likened Hakomi to an accordion that starts out closed, while accessing a specific felt sense or emotion. As she and the client discover more, the accordion begins to open, playing a bigger scale, unfolding to a larger transpersonal or spiritual experience. Starting small, she helps the client reveal aspects that were previously hidden from consciousness so they can become tangible. This indicates shifting from everyday shape and form to a larger transcendent view. She said: “The humble pilgrim is trying to find the holy one, which is oneself. The holy one needs us to make things real in a world that evolves consciousness.” (personal communication, Barstow, 2006).

In working spiritually oriented clients, Barstow invites them to travel from big to small, exploring the relevance of day-to-day emotions. This type of person might take a vast, global view of suffering, without tending to the immediate messy sphere of emotions and confusion. Cedar visited The Great Stupa of Dharmakaya in the Rocky Mountains. A single calligraphic stroke, called an Ashe, was inlaid in the ornate floor. She said: “Life boils down to that one powerful symbol on the floor” (personal communication, Barstow, 2006).

**Hakomi Principles**

Founded in the 1970’s by American psychotherapist, Ron Kurtz, Hakomi has three main foundations.

Hakomi is rooted in three sources: modern psychotherapy, especially body-centered therapy; Taoism and Buddhism, especially in their principles of mindfulness and non-violence; and general systems theory, especially living systems, which are self-organizing in nature and are best studied from a process oriented point of view. (Kurtz, 2007b, p. 7)

Hakomi provides a safe and secular framework for individuals to access their inherent healthiness in tandem with limiting unconscious habits. It helps individuals reorganize concepts and beliefs, revealing unaware core material that formed early on. Slowing down and studying experience, creates a compassionate environment to examine habitual tendencies we aren’t necessarily aware of.

Bill, a writer, Buddhist, and intuitive said he felt that an “allegiance to stopping or slowness” in the midst of speed, defining speed as a samsaric gestalt.

I see the first noble truth [the truth of suffering] expressed in this age as an engine, craving gasoline, souped up, a 140 mega hertz chip… that’s what speed is, always moving around. These days I almost feel that anyone who stops doing anything is helping! (Laughter)… When I got to Cambodia, I walked everyday in this one neighborhood for two months and gradually began walking with the people there, understanding immediately that they had not been ripped away from a kind of earthy synchronicity, an earth connection, unless they had become middle class and then they started to walk differently, they’d speed up. (personal communication, Scheffel, 2005)

As Kurtz notes in relation Bill’s idea of slowness: “It is easy to be present, if we are not busy doing something else.” (Kurtz, 2004, p. 7) Hakomi embraces five guiding principles as its foundation.

These guiding principles inform the entire method, from the healing relationship

to each technique. They function on a moment-to-moment basis, guiding the entire process. In experienced therapists, they are habitual attitudes. As embodied beliefs, they are a spiritual practice and a base of support for all one does

(Kurtz, 2007a, p. 1).

1.) Organicity - Living organisms are capable of “rebooting” and healing themselves. Any growth, unfolding, new direction, or resolutions occur because of an experience or change within the client. The client/therapist relationship supports and helps manage this organic process. “Healing is an act of self-recreation… Organicity refers to the process of dynamics of self-organization – the internally directed creation maintenance and evolution of living systems.” (Kurtz, 1990, p. 25).

2.) Mindfulness is an effort to be present and awake to one’s experience as it is now. Used in Hakomi as the ground to work from, both Hakomi and Buddhism utilize mindfulness and awareness as primary methods for self-discovery.

…one is following ones experience, without trying to control what happens next. In this way, we begin to recognize and understand how our beliefs and habits organize our experiences. When that happens, we have a chance to challenge and change them. The entire Hakomi method falls apart without mindfulness. Hakomi is the method of evoked experience in mindfulness. No mindfulness; no Hakomi. A second aspect of mindfulness is its sensitivity and vulnerability. By quieting the mind and dropping ones management behavior (sometimes called defenses), one makes oneself deliberately vulnerable. (Kurtz, 2007a, p. 2)

3.) Non-Violence – Non- violence goes with the grain therefore resistance is reduced. Violence is as subtle as a therapist assuming to know what is best for a client. Non-violence works with defenses, not against them. People continually “manage experience” as a means to avoid direct experience. The non-violence principle provides a safe way to explore defenses. “Non-violence supports the client's management (defense) system by seeing what is underneath, what is being protected, and helping protect.” (Kurtz, July 2007b p. 3). “Another way that non-violence operates is by placing the emphasis on experience rather than advice or interpretation… (Kurtz, 1990, pp. 29-30)

This [trying to be helpful] is the most common problem Hakomi therapists have. They do not always know when to wait and let the client unfold his or her own process. They are too full of the desire to help, to do a good job, to make something happen. Something is already happening! Just learn to dance with it! (Kurtz, 2007a, p. 3)

4.) Mind-Body Holism - Describes how mind influences the body or conversely how body effects the mind. Observing how deeply held beliefs, images, or significant early memories are held in the body, information is revealed through body structure, physiology, posture, movement, gesture, facial muscles, and even the immune system.

As a practical matter, in Hakomi, we use this mind-body relationship to create

experiments which cross the "mind-body interface". We use touch and other

physical interventions and ask what images, memories, thoughts were evoked. We

also offer statements and ideas and ask what bodily experience was evoked. It is

knowing that there is a connection between mind and body that allows this method to use the body as part of the search for organizing beliefs.

(Kurtz, 2007a, p. 5)

Cathy, a Buddhist, Hakomi and Plant Spirit Medicine practitioner, feels that the body is the unconscious. Cellular memories, wounds, and trauma are stored deep in the tissues (personal communication, Hubiak, 2006). Unconscious memories promote behaviors that seemingly come from out-of-the-blue. Until these “missing experiences” are recognized and given what they need to move forward body/mind memories remain stuck.

5.) Unity - Wholeness is a sense of belonging, of being part of something. To genuinely listen to another person or be heard by another inspires unity. Unity examines separateness between one another as well as a split within ourselves. Unity works with persona and shadow, the parts and the whole. “This drive to unite is a healing force. This process of communication, organizes parts into wholes. That’s the healing.” (Kurtz, 1990, p. 33)

[Unity] is reflected in the work by our recognition that the other is nothing less than a spiritual brother or sister, to be respected, protected, nurtured and loved. Alignment with this principle imbues the therapist with compassion and invites

his or her vision to embrace the vast web of connections that create the client's world. (Kurtz, 2007a, p. 1)

**Hakomi Technique**

This following material is paraphrased from various authors from *The Hakomi Method of Experiential Psychotherapy Training Manual 2006.*

• Build the relationship by creating a safe environment. Therapist listens to client and tracks their body and verbal language. Simple contact statements such as “Brings up some sadness, huh?” makes client feel understood.

• Use mindfulness to create a conducive environment for client and therapist to study the client’s experience. Slow experience down so experience can be observed.

• Notice themes. Get ideas about how the person organizes experience and what beliefs influence their experience.

• Do “little experiments” in mindfulness to test your ideas.

The Hakomi Method is a form of body-centered psychotherapy based upon self-study in mindfulness. We teach clients to become mindful, to turn attention inward so that they can notice the spontaneous emergence of feelings, thoughts, body patterns, and images. With a client in this state of heightened awareness, we instigate "little experiments" in a process of self-discovery. A phrase [known as a probe], such as, "You are safe here," may be stated by the therapist; and the client, in mindfulness, notices her automatic reaction to this sentence. These automatic reactions reveal valuable information about the state of the client's internal psychophysical landscape. (Ogden, 2007, p. 2)

• Work with the emotions, memories, images, insights, thoughts, impulses, tensions, sensations or even a feeling of nothing happening, all evoked by experiments. These are all expressions of core material and when brought into consciousness can be challenged and worked with.

• Help create missing experiences that limiting beliefs have prevented. For instance, if a client believes there is no support, the therapist may ask the client to reach out with their hand. The therapist reciprocates by offering their hand to the client. In mindfulness this simple gesture can unleash strong beliefs about support.

**The main techniques Hakomi uses are simple.**

This is the work of Ron Kurtz and was extracted from (Kurtz, 2007a, p. 1)

• Follow the flow of the client's present experiences. (Tracking).

• Name the experiences, once in a while, to demonstrate to the client, especially the unconscious mind of the client, that you are "getting it." (Contact and acknowledgement).

• Detect and adjust to the person's unconscious needs (Non-violence and organicity principles).

• Think about what sort of history and beliefs lead the person to organize his or her experience the way the therapist notices it is being organized. (Themes and character map).

• Create little experiments, like probes and taking over, which evoke and access character material or the systems the client operates under, usually unconsciously. Experiments test hypotheses about the person and evoke memories and emotions that bring character material into consciousness.

• Probes are short statements such as “It’s OK to have needs.” Always issued in mindfulness, they reveal a person’s subconscious and automatic reaction to various beliefs. Automatic reactions to probes reveal information such as habitual tendencies, limitations, or missing experiences.

• Taking over consists of simple experiments where the therapist takes over a behavior pattern for the client. For instance if a client often leans to one side, the therapist may support that side of body for the client. Together they study the effect of a simple adjustment such as this, often revealing profound insights.

• Work with emotions that are evoked by supporting spontaneous management behavior and by creating secondary experiments to move the process along.

• Seek to discover and to provide, at least for the moment, the experiences that have been missing as a result of the effects of limiting beliefs and habits. (Missing experiences) Dismantling old beliefs that don’t serve the client, gradually allow more accurate and satisfying beliefs to become healthier habits.

**Core Beliefs and Neuroscience**

Hakomi is an inquisitive and compassionate system that studies how human experience is organized.

At all levels experience is organized. Emotional experiences, as well as thought and language, are also the outcome of many layers of organization. As Hakomi therapists, the kind of organizer’s we’re interested in are the ones that exert the strongest influence on our personalities and our whole way of being: our beliefs, habits, convictions, attitudes, emotionally charged memories and general frames of reference. We call these core material. (Kurtz, 2004, p. 1)

Hakomi therapy seeks to alleviate unnecessary suffering by revealing and shifting unconscious core beliefs. Core beliefs wreak havoc when they operate outside of awareness. It’s similar to driving in a fast car, without knowing who is taking you for a ride. Through observing a client’s behavior and automatic habits, the therapist conducts experiments to reveal who is actually driving the car.

“In ordinary consciousness, habitual resistance to or denial of what is creates the unease and discontent that most people accept as normal living” (Tolle, 1999, p. 61).

The client usually experiences information as an intuitive felt-sense generated from both the emotional and cognitive centers of the brain. It does not unfold through analysis or by figuring it out.

During a Hakomi Training session, Phil Del Prince explained: bringing awareness to ingrained patterns often requires the help of someone who is trained to decipher and connect with non-conceptual language of the limbic part of the brain. Manifested as intuition or felt-sense reality, research shows that 80 - 85% of communication is non-verbal and located in the limbic section of the brain (personal communication, 2006). Felt-sense, limbic information encompasses how a person speaks, the intonations of their voice, gestures, what their body language says, as well as energetic signals, such as an air of anxiety, warmth, or coolness.

Steven Porges, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Illinois and director of the institution’s Brain Body Center addresses how areas of the brain operate. He developed polyvagal theory, which surmises that the evolution of the human nervous system and origins of brain structure dictate many of our social and emotional behaviors.

For example:

…how do we distinguish between friend or foe? There’s an area in the brain that picks up biological movements and intentions. That area detects familiar faces, familiar voices and familiar movements. So hand gestures, facial expressions and vocalizations that appear “safe” turn off the brain stem and the limbic areas that include fight, flight, and freeze responses. (Dykema, 2006, p. 33)

Described as three levels of function, the brain consists of basic survival or the reptilian brain; the limbic, emotional or intuitive brain; and cortical knowledge or thinking, cognizant brain. The reptilian brain is the most ancient and mediates our most basic functions such as arousal, sleep cycles, breathing, and digestion. The limbic section is described below:

Activation [of the limbic brain] is experienced as a total body experience. This area is concerned with emotions, but is also a bridge. Impulses pass from limbic structures to senses, the body in general, brain stem and the cortex. Body information influences the emotional state and emotions are essential for the thinking process. They let us know about the significance of input; danger, potential benefit and pleasure. Emotions influence our actions and our decisions as well as providing richness and favor to our conscious experience. (Morgan, 2006, pp. 11-12)

The cerebral cortex regulates impulses, social cognition, self-awareness, and autobiographical memory. It is sometimes referred to as a master integrator. It reconstructs meaning, organizes associations, and helps change mental states.

In primarily left-brained, linear people; limbic, “felt-sense knowing” is foreign. For right brained, non-linear thinkers, cognitive clarity gets lost in feeling.

When left and right brains operate in a disconnected way, the left brain makes up casual explanations without emotional and sensory data, and the right brain gets lost in feeling and confusion. Together they can come to an insight and understanding that feels deeply true and satisfying. (Morgan, 2006, p. 19)

Hakomi accesses all parts of the brain to discover how core material operates. The limbic section stores emotional memory, while the reptilian survival section functions automatically and unconsciously. The cortical section can become caught in logic and story, but also holds the overview and helps change patterns. When deeply embedded core beliefs become consciousness, habitual assumptions can then be challenged and altered, especially with the help of a therapist.

Hakiomi therapists help provide the client with experiences they never were able to have, called missing experiences. “The last task is to create the missing experience for the client. This breaks the trance and allows new, more accurate and satisfying beliefs to become habit” (Kurtz, 2004 p. 13). Hakomi co-founder, Phil Del Prince, describes this difficult and crucial stage of the healing process.

The label we use to describe deeper material that helps to shape and maintain our conscious experience is “core material.’ The metaphor we use to describe the internal territory where limiting aspects of this material resides is the “Nourishment Barrier… So the Nourishment Barrier represents the process we’ve organized to stay away from certain areas of need and nourishment that our early learning tells us is not acceptable or available, and that shows up in our conscious life in the form of consistent difficulties, dilemmas, problems, etc. (2006

Crossing the nourishment barrier is the process of reclaiming needs that were aborted in our early learning years. Behavioral strategies developed initially in life are non-aggressively challenged with a therapist’s support. By helping clients take small risks, clients identify what they want, do not have, or need. Identified as missing experiences, Hakomi therapists help clients develop new, healthier ways of being in the world. “It is a stop and go journey of study and experience and insight, trusting the process and the organicity of the individual to unfold.” (Del Prince, 2006)

Transformation happens over time. Integrating more satisfying beliefs into one’s daily life, bridges fresh discoveries explored in therapy. Being curious about what it might be like to “try on” new more satisfying behaviors is studied and supported. Techniques for integration include: anchoring in the body, loving the inner child, appreciating insights, storytelling, homework, ritual, and humor.

**Character Strategy Overview**

Character strategies are formed early in life around core issues of human contact, safety, need, dependency, separation, self-esteem, control, sexuality, competition and competence….Character strategies are organized, habitual patterns.

(Morgan, 2007, p. 3)

Clients generally come to therapy seeking change, to become “real,” or to know who they are. Character is exhibited by thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and habitual patterns - things that often get in the way.

Our character is like a set of clothes we put on to protect us from the elements, to hide what is underneath, to give a certain impression to the world. And like the clothes we choose to wear in our lives, the characteristics of character reflect something of the qualities of our essence. (Morgan, 2007, p. 5)

Character is not a tidy system of identifying personality types. Humans are complex systems and no one person creates a character style in the exact same way. We are a unique species and at the same time our humanness makes us very much alike. Character strategies correlate with developmental stages that were under-nourished early on in life. As we become familiar with beliefs formed in our developmental years, defensive strategies dissolve, allowing us to make new decisions about ourselves and our world. However character is not all bad. “Each style has an over and under-development of skill” (Morgan, 2007, p. 4). True character strategies are revealed when a person’s system is stressed. In therapy, individuals study the limiting aspects of character, observing what no longer serves them in present adult life. With mindfulness, maturity, and volition, a richer way of being in the world becomes available.

**Hakomi Map of Character**

Character is vast and complex. The descriptions provided below are meant to provide a general overview rather than a comprehensive account of each strategy. Material for this section was compiled primarily from *The Book of Character* compiled by Marilyn Morgan with writings by Stanley Keleman, Stephen Johnson, Jon Eisman, Ron Kurtz, Pat Ogden, Alexander Lowen, Cheryl Glickauf-Hughes, Marilyn Wells and others.

**Sensitive Withdrawn (Schizoid) and Sensitive Emotional (Hysteric) Strategies**

At birth babies need relationship. Lack of attunement and warmth at birth is a survival issue for the sensitive newborn. Infants respond to smell, touch, sound and appearance of the mother. When a newborn is not adequately cared for or protected, the baby’s terror is immense. To protect himself, the sensitive withdrawn schizoid type withdraws from seeking relationship, retreating into a safe inner world. The sensitive emotional hysteric type desperately clings to relationship, seeking connection, but is unsustained due to a barrier to trust. Both dread falling into an abyss of nothingness.

Sensitive withdrawn (schizoid) character defends by detaching. The ego is deeply split and prone to introversion. The desire to shut oneself up without anyone inside and achieve separateness helps secure safety. Sensitive withdrawn types lack commitment, tend to keep all possibilities open, react to grief by detachment, and shut the self off by closing to others. Communication is often indirect. They dislike touch and loving contact and are unable to be genuinely affectionate. They have defective identification with members of family members who should be closest to them. Sensitive withdrawn people are threatened when “seen” and relieved when they are subsequently left alone. Movements are guarded and they don’t feel emotions easily. They often seem cold, numb, and out of touch with themselves.

Energy is not fully in the body and these types are prone to dissociation. The underlying belief is the world is not safe, their right to exist is threatened, they are not welcome, and it is dangerous to be in contact with others. Relationships that are at a distance suffice, but intimate contact is a threat. The insight barrier prevents the desire to see or know, creating further isolation. This may cause occasional aggressive projections towards others, due to underlying terror with anger at the core.

Sensitive emotional (hysterical) personalities display the inverse of the schizoid, although the developmental origins are the same. Both sensitive withdrawn strategies defend against re-experiencing the dread of falling into the abyss of emptiness. The sensitive emotional, contrary to the withdrawn clings rather than detaches. Seemingly opposite, they are actually closely related due to their mutual terror of nothingness. Traits of the sensitive emotional include defense by attachment to external things and people. They desire to shut themselves in with someone to gain inseparability, achieve forced commitment, and avoid separation anxiety. Anxious when no one pays attention, they focus on a personhood outside the self and tend to over-identify with significant people in their lives. They are prone to suggestion, gregarious, crave pleasure, and dominated by the senses. They can be flamboyant and like to be noticed. Their inner world is secondary, shut off, and neglected.

The body may be stiff, eyes reach out or seem desperate, and the center of gravity is in the heart. Emotions and intuition are dominant. When contact is lost there is a sense of death. They talk a lot and have difficulty being alone. This strategy is maintained by over-sensitivity and continual demand for contact, which provokes others to pull away. Separation brings up terror and affirms beliefs about lack of connection, creating a reaction to cling tighter, pushing others away further.

**Dependent (Oral) and Self-Reliant (Compensated Oral) Strategies**

Little babies have urgent needs and they rely on caregivers to meet these needs.

In the first year or two of life, babies get distressed and depressed when left unattended in a needy deprived state. The oral response is triggered when a child experiences unreliable caregiving or neglect, even if the neglect was based on scheduled feedings rather than attunement to the child’s natural rhythm. The sense of never having enough or a chronic state of being unsatisfied permeates the psyche.

The dependent oral strategy collapses to varying degrees, believing that nurturing must come from the others or outside oneself and the belief there will never be enough. Helplessness, pleading eyes or acting small or weak, all exhibit oral behavior. At the same time, neediness is criticized. It is difficult to allow nourishment into the system and the oral dependent person often feels there is a bottomless pit that can never be filled.

The self-reliant dependent strategy feels the pain of deprivation, physical or emotional. Self-reliant people are strongly defended against neediness, preferring to take care of everything themselves. Denying their own needs, they support others and in this way get vicarious satisfaction. Sometimes labeled co-dependent, they have difficulty knowing they have needs or asking for help. A dependent person may fluctuate between oral needy collapse and grandiose self-reliant, “fix-the-world” behavior.

**Psychopathic Strategies: (Tough Generous, Narcissistic, and Charming Manipulative)**

Around three years old, little “Johnny” starts to become independent. He becomes the center of the universe, developing confidence and healthy self-esteem. For this to occur the child must be loved and appreciated but also taught realistic boundaries. If the child is treated as an object, shamed, betrayed, seduced, over controlled, ignored, or ridiculed, a protective strategy forms. Being vulnerable or weak is not acceptable, producing pain and shame. Being powerful is not an option because the adult is always stronger. The child’s true self is despised and in its place a false persona is created. Two kindred styles develop. The tough generous psychopath is over-inflated, dominant, superior, entitled, and in control. The masculine approach to exhibitionist narcissism, tough generous people are grandiose types who believe they can accomplish more than what is realistic.

The flip side is the charming manipulative psychopath who is a regressive, closet narcissist with feminine passive traits. The child learns to get what they want indirectly by pretense, seduction, compliance and pleasing others at all costs. Both strategies may exist in one person. Sexual energy is frequently used as a power dynamic. Pleasure is second to conquest and possession. Both styles are deceptive and because of this, they are hard to detect both in life and in therapy.

These people are the last ones anyone would suspect of lying, abuse, or deception. They are the nice guys from next door, always ready to offer a helping hand. “They present a likeable face to the rest of the world: charm obscures the abuser. And being liked feeds their self-image. Some are intensely charismatic” (Morgan, 2007, p. 58).

This strategy isn’t accountable, acts above the law, is unable to feel, lacks empathy, and does not care about the feelings of others. They learn to lie and cheat to get what they want. They can be abusive or aggressive. Tough generous kids might be prone to gang style behaviors. Parents may have humiliated, frightened, or dominated the child. Conversely they may have been put on a pedestal, like a little prince or princess.

**Burdened Enduring Strategy (Masochistic)**

Developmentally this strategy occurs between one and half to four year of age, although some psychologists believe it’s not fully developed until after puberty. Conflict occurs when the need to express, explore, or disagree, challenges the child’s right to approval, love, and emotional security. Burdened endearing strategies form when the child is pressured to conform against his will or desires. The child tries to maintain a sense of self and dignity while complying to others in order to assure acceptance. Burdened enduring people feel under pressure constantly and suffer from anxiety. Experiences in childhood include conditional love, breaking the child’s will, invasion, and guilt. They tend to complain and deprecate themselves, with a chronic tendency to suffer. Later in life, a counter position may develop through resistance, stubbornness, reactivity to sacrifice, becoming a victim, or being overly judgmental and critical of others, in order to feel powerful. These children may be scapegoated and humiliated. They would rather suffer than have their parent/s suffer and they easily submit to the will of others. Maintained by complaints, negativity, blame, automatic resistance, feeling victimized, being put down, and getting angry; the burdened enduring complies on the outside and defies on the inside.

**Expressive and Industrious Strategies (Rigid: Hysteric and Phallic)**

Developed from three years of age until adolescence, Expressive and Industrious Rigid strategies develop when “the child is not loved, supported, guided or recognized for his or her developing skills …destructive triangulation to ease relationship problems in the marriage set patterns for later love relationships” (Morgan, 2007, p. 95).

If love and recognition is dependent on making a fuss, being dramatic, noisy, entertaining, sexual, physically attractive, then the expressive strategy is encouraged. This style is often honored in the world of films and television and celebrity magazines. When the child realizes there is a chance of earning love and recognition by succeeding, working hard and achieving, the industrious strategy develops. It is one that is supported in the academic and business arenas. (p. 95)

Some attributes of the rigid style mimic earlier character strategies. Industrious (phallic) may seem tough and controlling. The industrious person however is a team player, where the tough generous psychopath must be the person in charge. Industrious types have a difficult time relaxing. They are workaholics, cut off from their feelings, and receive their sense of self worth through achievements. Seeking the approval of others, they have a difficult time relaxing, being playful and enjoying life.

The Expressive (hysteric) may look like the dependent, sensitive emotional, or charming type.

However in spite of appearances, the person with an expressive style can generally follow social rules, manage emotions, operate well from the witness place, and can tolerate not getting needs met. The expressive is seeking a loving relationship with independence preserved whilst the sensitive emotional is fearful of the abyss aloneness brings, the dependent wants to be taken care of… and the charming wants to control the other person (Morgan 2007, p. 96

The industrious rigid wants to know they are worthy and the expressive rigid wants to know they are loveable. Industrious people often had difficulty with fathers who made the child feel they weren’t good enough. Love is conditional and based on performance; the parent may be critical, obsessive, or withdrawn; and children are given too much responsibility. Industrious types were unable to be a kid. Unhealthy pressure for success and achievement, perfection and competitiveness, all contribute to the industrious character strategy. These people have difficulty being tender or allowing love in. They feel they always have work to do and that life is a problem to be solved. Conditions that encourage the expressive strategy include: a father who is seductive with the daughter; parents who are busy and pre-occupied; or a mother that dotes on or idealizes her son because the relationship with the spouse is weak. The heart needs to be protected from the pain of feeling no one understands them. Relationship patterns include sexualized behaviors, desire to be liked, flighty, irresponsible, superficial, focusing on relationships, acting helpless, dramatic, emotional turmoil, and searching for a romanticized parental figure.

This strategy needs to learn to be assertive and independent, distinguish the difference between love and sex, integrate feeling with thinking, and open the heart. Both the expressive and the industrious strategies want to fix things. Their mantra is “Let’s figure this out, we can do this, and if you can’t do it, I’ll fix it for both of us.”

This concludes a brief overview of character strategies from a Hakomi perspective. Understanding character helps therapists make meaning from the data they collect through experiments. Character indicates themes and provides a basic map of developmental issues that originally created unconscious core material.

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