

PsycHealth

Volume 16

Number 2, Summer 2006

Resource Newsletter of

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Self-Love is Misdirected

Denis Boyd, M.A.,
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In a recent radio interview, the creator of a dating service stated that he requires that his clients “love themselves” before he will work with them. He then added the common adage that “you can’t love another unless you first love yourself.” I disagree with this philosophy and contend that the ability to love others is derived from other sources.

Children develop a sound self-concept if their attachment needs are met early on in their development. The love of a parent or caregiver supports and affirms the identity of the child. If attachment needs, however, are overlooked or ignored, a child may experience a wounded self-concept. He may doubt his lovableness and become self-critical or self-demeaning.

Woundedness created by inadequate love from another, cannot be corrected by trying to “love oneself”. If our woundedness results from breakdowns in our early attachments, it makes sense that love from another person will be necessary to make the correction. Love is an action word, flowing from one person to another and in its pure form heals the giver and the receiver. Yet popular psychology is fond of prescribing the self-love quick fix.

Self-love proponents are quick to say that there is a difference between self-love and selfishness. It may, however, be difficult to separate the two. We are born very self-centred or selfish. Our fundamental needs are our focus. Unless we develop a social



conscience and awareness, we can grow up to be self-centred adults.

If we are feeling discouraged, asking us to become more self-centred is not likely to help. Discouragement may even be the result of being too self-occupied. Trying to bolster a discouraged self-concept by becoming one’s own greatest fan may not be effective and could unintentionally feed the selfish side of the individual.

How about considering self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses instead of self-love? How about considering self-acceptance of those strengths and weaknesses and making changes where desired or needed?

Buddhism teaches “No Self, No Problem”. Christianity teaches that a person who seeks his life will lose it and he who loses his life for the sake of love, will find it. Christianity also says to love our neighbour as ourselves; however, this is interpreted by the self-love crowd as permission to be great self-lovers. The teaching does not say, love yourself and then your neighbour. It says love your neighbour. How? The way you already love yourself. Self-love is a given.

Self-confidence and happiness/joy are paradoxical. If one is detached and forgets oneself and loves without counting the cost (unconditionally) there is resulting peace and joy. If one loves and “keeps score” there may be unhappiness and discouragement if expectations are not satisfied.

When a person is preoccupied with self pep talk there may be some payoff.... but not peace or joy.

The dating service fellow is matching up people in love with themselves who, as a result, may have

trouble making their relationships work as effectively as possible.

A good or great marriage is made up of two people who are able to ‘be there’ for each other. Good listening and consultation, and most importantly collaboration, are necessary for success. The ideas or preferences of the other person have to be as important as one’s own, if not more so at times.

A reactionary listener is someone who is self-focused to the point that he hears his own reaction rather than the feeling or idea of the other person. In marital counselling we work hard to break down this self-focus so that each spouse can better “hear” the other.

It is not possible to work out all of one’s insecurities before marriage as some of them only show up after the wedding. It is what happens between the couple that determines the success of the relationship, not how much each partner loves him or herself. Being with a spouse awakens old attachment issues from childhood and presents the opportunity to heal the wounds of the past.

Self-worth or esteem is not a prerequisite for intimacy but rather the result.

Self-love is indeed misdirected.

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When Anxiety and Panic Take Over

**Rick Hancock, Psy.D.,
Registered Psychologist**

Jessica is a young married woman undergoing considerable distress because of a pounding heart, a tightness in her chest, shortness of breath, sweating, dizziness, and intense fear. She does not know why this is happening and she is understandably concerned. When this occurred several times within a month she feared a heart attack and went to see her doctor. Fortunately, her tests were all negative and her doctor prescribed a mild tranquilizer.

Most people are unaware that such symptoms can be caused by anxiety. Some people, like Jessica, think that the panic symptoms are signs of a heart attack, impending death, or a loss of control over one's mind and body. In fact, assuming you have been cleared medically by your physician, these symptoms may be signs that your body is simply directing energy to self-protection. Anxiety is a response to a perceived threat, whether that threat is real or not.

Acute anxiety can be seen as a "powering up" of energy needed to deal with a life-threatening situation. We become primed for immediate action, which gives us the feeling we are either dying, going crazy, or losing control of ourselves. Once triggered, all the symptoms of the "flight or fight" response are initiated. This may explain why anxiety and panic attacks involve a wide range of symptoms. This "flight or fight" response is associated with an increase in the rate of breathing which allows more oxygen to be taken in. This symptom can result in breathlessness and even pain and tightening in the chest area. In turn, the blood supply to the head may be decreased, producing dizziness, confusion, blurred vision, unreality, and hot flushes. We then start to sweat, which is our body's attempt to cool down. Since this all takes a lot of energy, the anxiety sufferer may feel exhausted once the symptoms subside.

Symptoms of anxiety can be



prompted by a variety of factors as follows:

- External triggers such as loud noises, or visual threats such as vehicles, dogs, or lightning,
- General life stress which may create a high level of adrenalin such as when we are required to speak in public or if we feel trapped by a large crowd,
- Hypersensitivity to the normal variations of our physical state such as reactions to various foods or medications resulting in minor changes in the heart rate or body temperature, and
- Slight hyperventilation as a result of breathing too fast, for instance during or after running,

which may cause light-headedness or sweating.

Sometimes people start to avoid situations that are associated with their anxiety but it may be that their physical responses rather than the situation are the cause of the problem. Unfortunately, avoidance can lead to severe restrictions in daily activities but no relief from symptoms.

Treatments for panic and anxiety include medication and/or therapy. Certain medications can provide fast-acting anxiety reduction. However, some anti-anxiety medications may have serious side effects, may be dangerous if taken in large quantities or combined with alcohol, and may have a diminished effect on anxiety over time. Always consult with your physician before taking medications for anxiety.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy has been shown to be effective in treating panic and anxiety disorders. Individuals learn to identify core beliefs and thought patterns that lead to anxiety symptoms. By changing these cognitive patterns individuals learn to avoid the negative thoughts that lead to panic and anxiety. In addition, such treatment may involve learning relaxation techniques such as paced breathing exercises or progressive muscle relaxation. And for those triggered by specific situations like fear of driving or fear of public speaking, various forms of systematic desensitization have proven to

be most helpful.

Anxiety exists to protect us from threatening situations and occasional anxiety is a normal part of life. However, if anxiety or panic attacks are causing serious problems contact your physician, your local mental health office, or a registered psychologist or counsellor.

Reference:

Aboussafy, Ph.D., David. 2006. *Don't Panic: Causes of Anxiety and Panic Symptoms*. UBC & UCounsel Corporation.

Parenting Course for Parents of Teens

(Systematic Training for Effective Parenting)

Presented by

Don Lasell, M.A.

Registered Clinical Counsellor

Topics Include:

- Interacting and communication in a more positive and effective manner
- Understanding the importance and difference between *encouragement vs. praise* and *consequences vs. punishment*
- Encouraging cooperation and respect
- ... and more

**Date: September 20 to
October 11, 2006**

(every Wednesday for 4 weeks)

Time: 7:00pm - 9:30pm

**Cost: \$100.00/person
\$125.00/couple**

(Parenting Manual included)

Location:

**202-1046 Austin Avenue
Coquitlam, BC V3K 3P3**

**Please register by calling
604-931-7211**

Fostering Resilience: Lessons from an African Perspective

**Joan Schultz, Ph.D.,
Registered Clinical Counsellor**

Once you embark upon it, you must be prepared for a life-changing impact. Perspectives are skewed. Paved roads, refrigerators and \$100 running shoes take on new status as luxury items, not necessities. You will come back to North America wondering what we're all whining about here. A trip to Africa makes us dissatisfied with our own expectations for a life of comfort and ease.

Experiencing life in Zambia made me increasingly aware of the disparity between our "have" culture and the "have not" culture existing there. Through the media we have thankfully been made aware of the difficulties so many people have experienced in recent decades in Africa – the HIV crisis, poverty, political unrest, corruption and indescribable adversities. The implications of the violence, abuse and poverty confront us with the need to be personally involved to impact our world.

There are aspects of African life that are not readily apparent at first exposure. These are the lessons to be learned about resilience to adversity – resilience observed through individual reactions to extreme difficulty. I observed Zambians making daily choices to be grateful for small things, being determined to hold positive expectations for the future or even being focused on helping others despite not having enough to meet their own basic survival needs.

These observations led to a number of conclusions:

- Firstly, BIG joy can be fostered with small gratefulnesses.
- When moments of joy do come, you need to make the most of them because you don't know when an opportunity to celebrate may come again.
- Creativity can make up for lack of technology or almost anything else one feels one must have to survive.



• And finally, even the harshest of adversities can be overcome with supportive relationships, a sense of purpose in life, perseverance and positive attitudes. These are things that foster resilience in hostile circumstances.

In recent research, positive emotions are found to increase creativity, build personal resources for coping and enable one to take new perspectives of old problems (Isen 2003). Barbara Fredrickson takes this concept one step further in her "Broaden and Build" model by suggesting that "cultivated positive emotions not only counteract negative emotions but also broaden individuals' habitual modes of thinking; thus building their personal resources for coping" (1998, p.1). Does this mean whining is

out?

The concept was enlivened for me with the experience of a torrential rainstorm in Kitwe. A group of women from the community were gathered for a meeting in a tin-roofed church close to the village. The sounds of any speaking were suddenly drowned out by the tumultuous thundering of rain on the roof. Instead of cancelling the meeting and sending away children who came inside to escape the rain, the women began to sing and dance, forming a line and waving in and around internal structures, creating a spontaneous celebration. *Their reaction to the problem redefined it.*

Each one of us is faced with choices on how to respond to everyday difficulties in life. Some of us are faced with larger adversities, which can potentially drain us of the strength and the motivation needed to continue on. We can choose our reactions: withdraw in resignation to our fate or choose to persevere with help from friends and family. This involves being grateful for small things along the way and remembering that each of us has a mandate to use our abilities to make an impact for good wherever we are. If

there was one more lesson the Zambians taught me - it was this: a life of self-absorption is no guarantee of satisfaction and correspondingly, a life of apparent deprivation and tragedy does not limit our capacity to bounce back to a life of joyful meaning.

References:

Fredrickson, B. (1998). *What good are positive emotions?* Review of General Psychology, 2, 300-319.

Isen, A.S. (2003) *Positive affect as a source of human strength.* In G.L. Aspinwall and U.M. Stuedinger (Eds). *A psychology of human strengths: Fundamental questions and future directions for a positive psychology.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

What Is A Great Marriage? A three hour workshop on how to revitalize your relationship.

Presented by

Denis Boyd, M.A.
Registered Psychologist

Topics Include:

Attitude
Daily Talk Time
Listening
Dating and Sense of Humour
Forgiveness
... And more

**Monday, October 16, 2006
7:00 to 10:00 pm**

**Cost: \$25.00/person
\$40.00/couple**
(Handouts included)

Location:
**202-1046 Austin Avenue
Coquitlam, BC V3K 3P3**

**Please register by calling
604-931-7211**

My Child Won't Listen

Nancy Michel, M.A.
Registered Psychologist

Emily's mother sighs with apparent exhaustion as she describes regular conflict with seven year old Emily. "She doesn't listen to anything I say. She seems to go out of her way to annoy me. Whatever I ask—she does the opposite." Even as a baby Emily was intense and persistent. While her daughter's testy behavior previously occurred only at home—those outside the family have typically described Emily as positive and cooperative, more recently Emily has become engaged in a battle of wills with her Grade 2 teacher. Now her mother wonders how someone outside the family will cope with Emily's determined resistance. Emily's mother herself wakes daily with a sense of apprehension, wondering what issue will provoke that day's battle with her child.

A personable and capable youngster, Emily also describes regular fights with her mother. Emily however is convinced that her mother deliberately tries to frustrate and annoy her whenever she comments on Emily's behavior, makes requests, or sets out limitations for her daughter.

A pattern of tension in this parent child relationship is apparent. Emily bristles whenever her mother approaches her with a request. Her mother, in turn, anticipates a contrary response whenever she gives Emily direction. Both parties are tense and defensive in their interactions together. They are engaged in a longstanding power struggle that has undermined opportunities for trust, goodwill and easiness in their relationship. A change in this pattern will require addressing the beliefs and behaviors of both parent and child. Important steps to improving their relationship will include:

1. Emily's mother defining her role as The Parent, as a wise and capable mentor rather than adversary to her

child. Her actions should remind Emily that they are, in fact, on the same team, with the ultimate goal of supporting Emily to maturity.

2. Her mother needs to avoid reacting in ways that encourages Emily to believe that she can overwhelm her mother. Emily needs to know that her mother is strong and capable of dealing with all her oppositional and childlike behaviors, no matter how frustrating, and that her mother will apply reasonable consequences when appropriate.

3. Her mother should avoid engaging in future power struggles by consistently stepping away from escalating conflict with Emily. Increasing demands or threatening consequences in the midst of conflict only adds fuel to the fire, increasing the emotionality of both child and parent. Her mother will be encouraged to wait (where possible) until Emily was calmer and more receptive before readdressing a contentious issue

or before discussing consequences and other ways of settling future issues. For example, mother and daughter might agree to a mutual Time Out whenever conflict escalates with the expectation that they will reunite to address the issue once they have both calmed.

4. Emily's mother needs to ensure that her expectations are reasonable for Emily's age and abilities. She will be encouraged to monitor how she communicates with Emily. What ratio of positive to negative comments is Emily hearing from her mother? Is she restricting her control in Emily's life to issues that she considers



most significant? Does she encourage Emily to express her own opinions and make her own choices where possible? When she sets out expectations for Emily, does she expect compliance?

5. Emily's mother needs to acknowledge her daughter's cooperative behaviors and efforts to be compliant. Encouraging positive behavior will allow both mother and daughter opportunity to believe similar behavior can occur and will occur in the future.

Many parents have power struggles with their children, especially when the child is strong-willed like Emily. It is important for parents to remember that they will do best when they step out of power struggles and instead practice the art of encouraging positive behavior, discussing issues when everyone is calm, and applying reasonable consequences where necessary.

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