

Addicted to Despair



This is a type of addiction that is not as widely known, but can still be as debilitating as other high profile addictions. Ultimately, the addiction can keep the individual stuck in despair for a very long time. It also operates at a very unconscious level which makes it quite difficult for the person to recognise and identify. It is not as visible as other addictions. For instance, there is no bottle or syringe, only an array of broken dreams, relationships and aspirations.

The addiction operates in a very subtle way, which usually takes the form of a person listening to a very negative/critical aspect of themselves, this then keeps them stuck in a repetitive pattern. Put simply, it's like being tuned into one radio station. Unfortunately, the music coming from this radio station is one of despair, with lyrics consisting of statements like; you're not going to cope if you change; you're not good enough, your ugly, nobody wants me, I will always be on my own, I'm not intelligent. The most powerful lyric of all; it's everybody else's fault.

The person is desperate to change, they do not enjoy being or feeling this way yet they continue to listen to the same radio station! Sadly this means that they're perpetual victims, unable to break free of this internal situation. For some, they may even proclaim that the radio station (way of thinking) is who they are. However, people are not born this way!

My perspective stems from three quite different traditions, where the central idea is that in every human being we are born with what Carl Rogers called the 'self-actualisation tendency'. Carl Jung refers to it as the 'individuation process' and Sigmund Freud identified 'eros - the life instinct'. Although three diverse perspectives, the one common thread that appears to unite them is the idea that in every individual we are born with the potential to understand our true self. Unfortunately, due to the challenges/trauma of early life, for the majority of people their ability to reach and find their true self/potential gets lost or even distorted. Thus, for some people living a life full of despair is the shadow side of this search for meaning.

So how can we help people with this internal mind set? The first step is to enter into a process of psychological awareness which usually means entering into therapy. Secondly, enabling the person through insight and challenge to identify the above dynamic in operation. Thirdly, the creation of what I entitle 'internal breathing space' where an individual can move from a 2D picture of themselves to a 3D perspective. For instance, moving from blaming themselves or everybody else for their misfortune (2D) to understanding the underlying dynamics which has led to an addiction to despair (3D). In essence, 3D thinking represents not just the conscious level but unconscious levels as well. Finally, encouraging people to take self-responsibility to fight **for** themselves rather than fighting **with** themselves or others, which ultimately leads to a life full of despair.