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Psychotherapy
Couples
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Group Seminar Audio Series

Vs. Getting What You Want: Disappointment in the Era of Ease, Entitlement and Gratification

Amidst a sociocultural landscape of eye-popping technology, widespread attitudes of immediate gratification and narcissistic individualism, and an emerging generation of youth who ardently disagree with Angela Duckworth's extolling of grit in her book of the same name, perhaps more people than ever before struggle with the paradoxical experience of not getting what they want. This has emerged as the primary reason why new patients contact me to be seen in psychotherapy. It seems as if we have artificial intelligence and its promise of a widening scope of ease on the one hand and, on the other hand, a mysterious set of incomprehensible factors that still leave many of us unable to attain that which we truly want: love, serenity, contentment, security, etc. The study of happiness and fulfillment is still in its infancy, formalized only decades ago with the birth of "positive psychology." But if the celebrated Netflix sci-fi technological horror series "Black Mirror" anticipates with any accuracy what is in store for us as a species, then a "negative psychology" will soon be needed: in an atmosphere of ease and plenty, how does one utilize or even tolerate the components of human experience that cannot be managed, altered or crafted to our liking? What is known about the psychology of disappointment? *This seminar was recorded on April 6, 2019, in Laguna Hills, CA.*

Key Excerpts:

- *Disappointment cannot be avoided; what seems important is how a person overcomes and grows from disappointment, uses it for growth.*
- *The emotional experience of disappointment is highly correlated with expectation, i.e., the higher the expectation for success, the greater the degree of disappointment if success is not achieved.*

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Key Excerpts (continued)

- *Shame, depression, self-esteem and guilt are emotional/psychiatric conditions that have been scientifically linked to disappointment.*
- *The first experience of disappointment occurs in the infant's bond with the caregiver. There's a moment, no matter how good the mother or caregiver is, when she is not going to be available to the child or responsive to the child in the way the child needs. She's going to frustrate the child. This is an experience of disappointment that often initiates a shame-based response in the child.*
- *In healthy people, as they develop they learn to tolerate normal expectable disappointments occurring in everyday life and, consequently, are less attached to outcomes and preferences because disappointments are easily tolerated.*
- *"Disappointment tolerance" is a psychological construct demonstrated by researchers. The more one experiences disappointment, the greater one's capacity is to tolerate future disappointments because expectations are gradually lowered to the point that when success is not achieved it's not really a big deal.*
- *Disappointment appears to be neurochemically-wired and stimulates the brain with a surge of dopamine. This seems to make certain people more prone to the need for roller-coaster experiences of success followed by disappointment followed by success.*
- *Disappointment may lead to an increase in one's motivation; in spite of being unable to control the current disappointing situation, some believe they will be able to control future situations.*
- *There are two kinds of effort. "Instrumental effort" refers to effort that increases the probability of obtaining a desired outcome, e.g., studying hard for an exam. "Non-instrumental effort" refers to effort expended with the belief that an outcome will be obtained but which does not increase the probability of obtaining the desired outcome. Research indicates that investing more instrumental effort increases the intensity of*