Netherlands Institute of Core Energetics

Pleasure

exploration, assessment and liberation

in Core Energetic Therapy

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Your feedback and questions are welcomed and valued.
If you want to experience my work in real life, please take a look at my website www.healingpractice.be and contact me at annickschuerman@hotmail.com.

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Introduction

"Take your pleasure seriously" (Ray and Charles Eames)

Therapy can be serious business. It was a relief to read Tanja's paper on Humor and Playfulness. *"Humor is that what makes us laugh, playfulness is the attitude that gives you the space to experience humor, the light energy that allows for experiment. Laughing results...".*
It set me thinking and searching. For I have experienced times in my life that I was definitely not playful. And to my frustration, I've felt my pleasure being blocked more than once. So I decided to take a closer look at pleasure. Typical me: if I can study it, we might someday become fully reconciled, my pleasure and me.

"Pleasure is a feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment" (Oxford Dictionary).
Laughing results here too, or smiling. You can't help it, it shows, you feel it. Or not… Vulnerable stuff. Our teacher Erena Bramos commented on my plan: "We all could write a book on how we block our pleasure, right?" Nice! So I am definitely not alone in this, and I hope this exploration may serve others and myself to find our way back to (more) pleasure.

I wish to share with you some of the scientific data as well as some more philosophical viewpoints around pleasure that seem most relevant to our Core Evolutionary Process (CEP) context. On the internet, pleasure points foremost to numerous erotic and sexual liberation sites, and I also found some rare sites where pleasure is explored on other levels and said to be the experience of essential qualities. I learned from all. Core training for sure leads to pleasure all sorts.
As a Core therapist, I see it as my, our, task to restore and promote the flow of pleasure in ourselves and in our client. While we work with unique clients and their unique life stories, it is nice to have some navigation charts and to get more grip on the patterns that we share in our humanity. We all long for pleasure and at times avoid it. Insight alone is not enough, the energy needs to move in the body. We work with the images and beliefs around pleasure or the absence of pleasure, we help lift and relieve the feelings of shame and guilt, of fear and depression that block our pleasure. We assist in enlarging the window of tolerance for pleasure so the client can savor more of it.
I feel grateful for the Pathwork as an immensely valuable guide. Thanks also to the staff and students of BBSH and NICE who taught, teach and tease me on my journey, to Sophie de Lacaze who was inspiring me along the road. And especially thanks to my advisor, Tanja Konig, who reminds me to relax: "It helps to descend from your pedestal and allow yourself to explore. If I can allow myself to experiment, even with playfulness, I help the client enormously". And while I do, I grow too. Let's take a look.

1. Definitions in pleasure territory

Pleasure (noun) is a feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment. An event or activity from which one derives enjoyment. Sensual gratification (Oxford Dictionary).
Pleasure (noun) is "a condition of enjoyment," from Old French *plesir*, also *plaisir* " enjoyment, delight, desire, will" (12c.), from noun use of infinitive *plaisir* (v.) "to please," from Latin *placere* "to please, give pleasure, be approved". Meaning mostly "sensual enjoyment" (www.etymonline.com)
In many psychology books, the concept "pleasure" is not to be found in the index. Happiness is easier to find. Since Aristotle, happiness has been usefully thought of as consisting of at least two aspects: **hedonia** (pleasure) and **eudaimonia** (a life well lived). In contemporary psychology these aspects are usually referred to as pleasure and meaning (Krinkelbach & Berridge).

Hedonic (adjective): relating to, characterized by, or considered in terms of pleasant sensations. Origin mid-17th century: from Greek hēdonikos, from hēdonē 'pleasure'.
Anhedonia (noun): inability to feel pleasure in normally pleasurable activities.
Affect is the experience of a feeling. (Divine and negative pleasure are both pleasurable but have different affect).
Euphoria is a state of happiness and confidence.
Dysphoria is a state of unease or generalized dissatisfaction with life.
Where hedonism is all about pursuing pleasure, **asceticism** is all about *doing without pleasur*e. To an ascetic, indulging in pleasure is a kind of weakness and distraction that would prevent them living up to their spiritual values and attaining their spiritual goals, usually being selfless, without desires, reaching the highest levels of meditation, and serving others purely. Asceticism is found in nearly all religious traditions.
An **altruist** is someone who puts everyone *else's* happiness and well-being above their own. By preference without hurting himself; you simply have to do things for other people with no expectation of reward for yourself. Many people believe that hedonism is the *opposite* of altruism. Many philosophical and religious traditions have argued that they are not — that the greatest joy in life comes from bringing joy to others, and that my well-being ultimately depends on your well-being. If this is true, then the ultimate hedonist would also be the ultimate altruist! This idea is central in Buddhism (philosophyterms.com).
In the **Pathwork**, pleasure doesn't mean pleasurable pastimes of the mind, not shallow substitutes and escapes. But a state of physical and spiritual bliss that is experienced in every particle of one's body and soul, **of the outer and inner being**, with all sensations and faculties alive, awake and feeling. A total experience, not divided, your entire being vibrates and pulsates.
In both BBSH and Core Energetics, we work with the concepts from the Pathwork: pleasure is the sensation of the Life Force, flowing through the body. **Divine pleasure** emanates from our harmonious experience of our life, body and soul. And **negative pleasure arises** where the pleasure current gets (unconsciously) attached to negativity**.**

2. Scientific literature

2.1. Pleasure

The **Freudian** concept of pleasure, **the pleasure principle**, describes it as a positive feedback mechanism, motivating the organism to recreate in the future the situation which it has just found pleasurable and to avoid situations that have caused pain in the past. Man wants to experience strong feelings of pleasure. Freud contrasted the pleasure principle with the **reality principle**, which describes the capacity to postpone gratification of a desire in view of later and even larger pleasure. (Note: people also tend to repeat what they know, regardless).

Wilhelm Reich: speaks often about the natural, innate capacities of human beings. Since the emergence of patriarchy, the **natural pleasure** of work and activity has been replaced by compulsive duty, a theme that is also important with **Alexander Lowen**.
The greatest experience of pleasure, the **sexual orgasm**, has the peculiarity that it presupposes a damming up of biological energy. The damming up (abstinence) itself is experienced as pleasure when there is the prospect of gratification and this gratification is not overly delayed. The damming- up when there is no prospect of gratification, and when the experience of pleasure is threatened with punishment, makes the organism rigid and incapable of pleasure.

Lots of different lists of emotions have circulated and pleasure is rarely included. **Paul Ekman** determined that there are six basic emotions, expressed by certain facial expressions that are

shared by people in all cultures. The six basic emotions are happiness, surprise, anger, disgust, sadness, and fear.

The body of research on pleasure doesn't seem to be enormous, and much comes from the groups around Morten Krinkelbach and Kent Berridge these days. They draw on their extensive knowledge in the fields of neuroscience and psychiatry, looking into the neuro-anatomy and -chemistry. The fluent writings of Desirée Kozlowski helped me to get more grip on the subject. Some highlights follow below.

Pleasure is **subjective** and **state dependent**, varying between and within individuals. For this reason it was for a long time not studied by scientists. Being however more definable and measurable than happiness, substantial progress in understanding the psychology and neurobiology of **sensory pleasure** has been made over the last decade. This hedonic side of happiness got finally used as a base for scientific research into happiness. While there is clearly a sharp conceptual distinction between pleasure versus engagement-meaning components, these aspects empirically cohere very well in happy people. Excessively high hedonic scores however may impede attainment of life success, as measured by wealth, education, or political participation (Oishi et al).
The link between pleasure and happiness has a long history in psychology. Freud said that people strive after happiness; they want to become happy and to remain so. This endeavor has two sides, a positive and a negative aim. It aims, on the one hand, at the experiencing of strong feelings of pleasure and, on the other, at an absence of pain and displeasure.
A related but slightly different view is that happiness depends mostly on eliminating negative "pain and displeasure" to free an individual to pursue engagement and meaning. Positive pleasure by this view is somewhat superfluous. This view may characterize the twentieth-century medical and clinical emphasis on alleviating negative psychopathology and strongly distressing emotions (Berridge and Kringelbach).

The nineties saw the emergence of a **Positive Psychology**, that can be viewed as the "fourth wave" in the evolution of psychology, the first 3 waves being, respectively, the disease model, behaviorism and humanistic psychology. Positive Psychology focuses on authentic happiness and the good life. It aims to develop interventions that build the enabling conditions of life, not just interventions that decrease misery (which are also important of course).
Seligman in 2002 described three basic *orientations* that lead to well-being in his *Authentic Happiness Theory*: The *life of pleasure*, a hedonic orientation that focuses on the experience of positive emotions; the *life of meaning*, a eudaimonic orientation that emphasizes how much you feel the activity is rewarding, helping you to advance your goals, or is worthwhile, serving a greater purpose; and the *life of engagement*, which focuses on the pursuit of highly engaging and absorbing activities and the thereby elicited experience of *flow*. Later adding two more orientations *positive relationships* and *accomplishment* in his 2011 version.

Pleasure is most often associated with satisfying **basic biological drives**, such as eating, drinking, exercise, hygiene, and sex. The appreciation of cultural artifacts and activities such as art, music, dancing, literature, and also finances, altruism and transcendence, is described as the **higher pleasures**. The available evidence suggests that brain mechanisms involved in basic pleasures **overlap** with those for higher-order pleasures (Kringelbach). And all pleasures seem to involve the same hedonic brain systems, even when linked to **anticipation and memory**.

There is also strong evidence of connections between the neurochemical pathways used for the perception of both **pain** and **pleasure**, as well as for other psychological **rewards**.

The **rewarding properties** for all pleasures are likely to be generated by hedonic brain circuits

that are distinct from the mediation of other features of the same events (for example sensory, cognitive). Thus, pleasure is never merely a sensation or a thought, but is instead an **additional hedonic gloss** generated by the brain via dedicated systems (Kringelbach & Berridge).
Hedonic brain networks are widespread: deep in the brain, in the evolutionary more primitive parts brainstem and midbrain, and also in the cortex. Pleasure or “liking” is but one component in the larger composite psychological process of reward, which also involves “wanting” and “learning” components (Smith). Pleasure causation as in “liking” has so far only been found in the subcortical structures. Hedonic evaluation (anticipation, appraisal, experience and memory) seems coded by the cortex, and there are close anatomical links to the subcortical hedonic hotspots.
While all pleasurable stimuli are rewards, some rewards do not evoke pleasure. (Schultz). An individual can “want” a reward without necessarily “liking” the same reward, as in addiction. At extreme, the addict may come to “want” what is neither “liked” nor expected to be liked, a dissociation possible because “wanting” mechanisms are largely subcortical and separable from cortically mediated expectation and conscious planning.

Human action is largely driven by estimations of future **pleasure and pain**.
Common sense tells us that people seek pleasure and avoid pain. But that is not always the case. Various activities involve pain, including running, hot massages, piercings and even BDSM (abbreviation for bondage, discipline, domination, submission, sadism and masochism). The link between pleasure and pain is deeply rooted in our biology. All pain causes the central nervous system to release **endorphins**, proteins which act to block pain and work in a similar way to opiates such as morphine to induce feelings of euphoria. They also stimulate the brain’s limbic and prefrontal regions, in the same areas activated by passionate love affairs and music. They give a post-pain rush that can make pain addictive Given that the mammalian brain routes pain and sexual signals through many of the same regions: including the hypothalamus, which regulates both mood and sex drive, the amygdala, which manages emotions, and the periaqueductal gray, which regulates both pain and female sexual behaviors, it probably shouldn’t surprise us that there’s some cross-talk. Or that thrill-seeking humans take advantage of it (BBC).

Dopamine used to be the **molecule of pleasure**, yet research shows that the brain’s dopamine system is highly active while someone experiences pain too, and that this response varies between individuals in a way that relates directly to how the pain makes them feel. It appears that dopamine acts as an interface between stress, pain and emotions and that it is activated with both positive and negative stimuli to mediate motivated behavior (Zubieta). Some neurotransmitters produce euphoria, such as endorphins and endocannabinoids. Other molecules such as oxytocin, serotonin, melatonin, acetylcholine, GABA, norepinephrine, phenylethylmine are said to be involved in happy feelings. Music, food and sex induce dopamine release, but aerobic exercise "runner's high" is related to endorphins, as well as to endocannabinoids. Alcohol and other CNS depressants and anesthetics such as "laughing gas" (nitrous oxide) may also produce euphoria. Pleasurable music has the capacity to diminishes our pain. The magnitude of the pain reduction was positively related to subjective appraisals of ‘liking” (Kozlowski, Swan). Complex phenomena, on which the last word is not spoken.

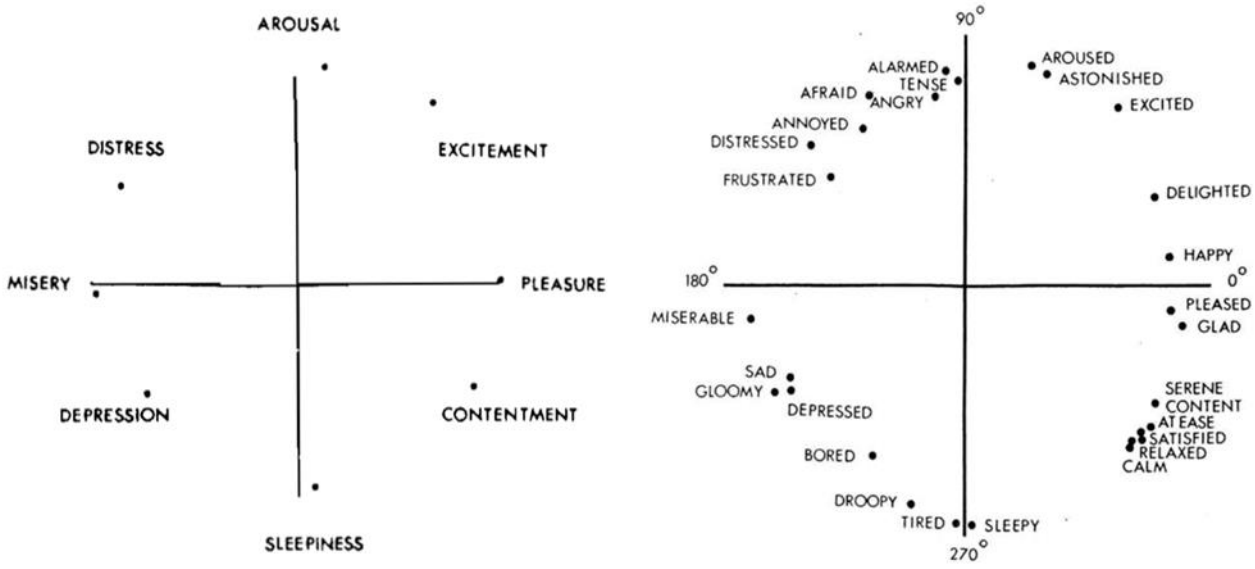
Social interactions are one of the most important factors for happiness in social animals like humans. Social pleasures may still include vital sensory features such as visual faces, touch features of grooming and caress, as well as in humans the more abstract and cognitive features of social reward and relationship (Krinkelbach and Berridge).

Focus on the hedonic component of happiness should not be confused with **hedonism**, which is the pursuit of pleasure for pleasure’s own sake, and more akin to addiction features. Also, to

focus on hedonics does not deny that some ascetics may have found **bliss** through painful self-sacrifice, a kind of bliss that can never be experienced by those who indulge in physical pleasures. It simply reflects that positive hedonic tone is indispensable to most people seeking happiness (www.philosophyterms.com).

2.2. Models of affect

Affect (the experience of feeling) research is often based on self-report. People interpret the moods of others, anticipate each other's response and seek to modify those responses. For this end, they organize their knowledge in a **cognitive structure** for affect. This structure eventually also helps shape their perception and interpretation of (verbal and non-verbal) events and to conceptualize and report on one's own emotional state (Russel).
Early conclusions state that there are 6-12 independent **monopolar factors** of affect, such as degrees of sadness, elation, anger…and that each of these affective concepts can be treated as a separate dimension, varying independently of the others. The theory of basic emotions posits that a discrete and independent neural system subserves every emotion.
One could also think these affects are not independent of each other but are related in a highly systematic fashion, wherein all affective states are understood to arise from common, overlapping neurophysiological systems.
They could be **bipolar**, e.g. with sadness on the one side and elation on the other side.
Schlosberg proposed a circular arrangement with only two bipolar dimensions, in a **2dimensional bipolar space**.



Bron: J.A. Russel

This **"circumflex model of affect"** proposes that all affective states arise from the cognitive interpretation of core neural sensations that are the product of two independent neurophysiological systems: one related to **valence (pleasure-displeasure)** and the other to **arousal.** The two dimensions (pleasantness-unpleasantness and arousal- sleep (or activation-deactivation) account for the major proportion of variance in judged similarities of words, in large groups of people across cultures. Myriad of affect terms fall meaningfully around the perimeter of the space defined by these two axes, meaning they could be defined as some combination of pleasure and arousal. Specific emotions arise out of patterns of activation within these two

systems, together with cognitive interpretations and labeling of the experiences.
And yes, affect has bipolar properties, all antonyms fall approximately 180° apart.

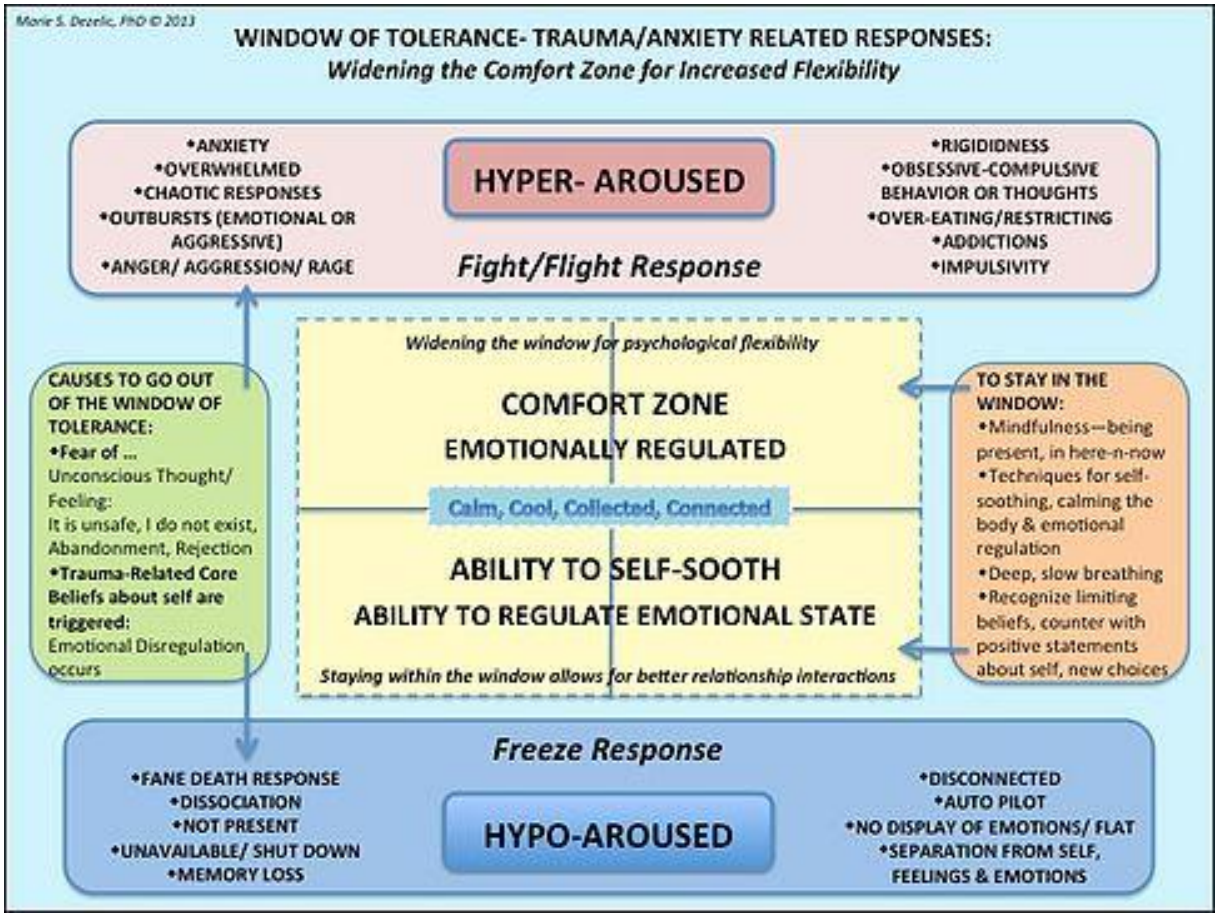
In studies pleasure-displeasure is conceptually distinct from the degree of arousal. Yet in the real world, they **co-vary**. They correlate positively if the affective states occur with equal signs, such as in delighted (+ on pleasure and + on arousal) or bored (- and -). And this happens more frequently than when the states occur with different signs as in angry (- on pleasure and + on arousal). The maps above speak of conceptual similarity only, not of frequency of states.
People seem to have difficulty in assessing, discerning and describing their own emotions. This difficulty suggests that individuals do not experience or recognize emotions as isolated, discrete entities but rather as ambiguous and overlapping experiences. When one feels bad, he is likely to report also feeling angry, down, guilty…whereas people who report feeling good are likely to report other positively valenced emotions.
Affective experience is the end product of a cognitive process that has already utilized the cognitive structure. The prefrontal cortex participates centrally in the experiencing of positive and negative emotions and cognitions, whereas neurophysiological changes related to valence and arousal presumably are subserved largely by subcortical structures (Posner). The prefrontal cortex probably plays an important role in integrating and modifying information gleaned from emotional systems, interpreting the sensations of pleasure and arousal within varying situational contexts, taking into account the experiences in the past and the expectations for the future.
Affective behaviors are not identical to **subjective (human) feelings**. Discrete neural pathways may underlie the behavior, whereas the feelings systems show overlap.

Temperament research reveals the existence of stable psychological profiles that begin in infancy and persist throughout adulthood. Positive and negative affectivity being stable and inheritable treats. (And so is the capacity for pleasure and arousal?)

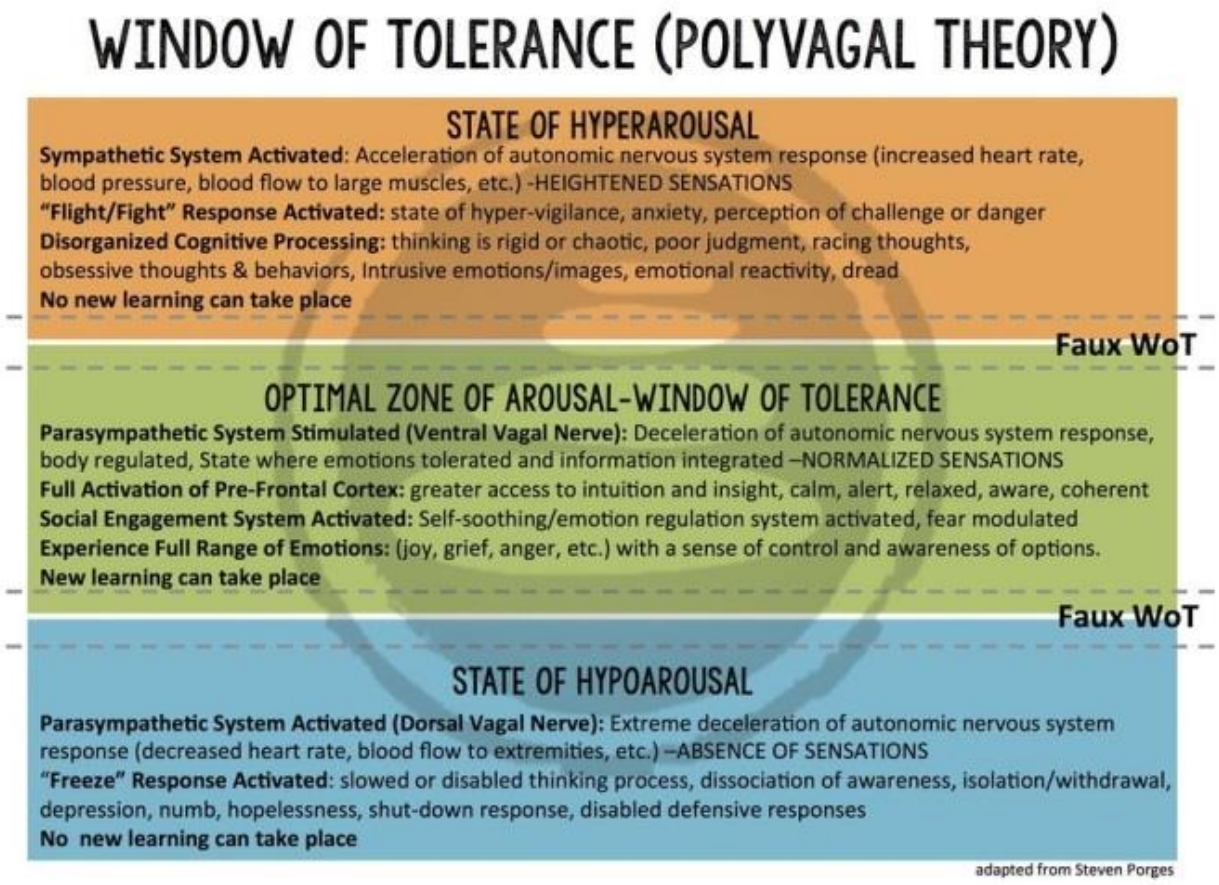
As pleasure and arousal seem connected, we should take a closer look at arousal too.

2.3. Window of tolerance

Window of tolerance (WOT) is a term used to describe the zone of arousal in which a person is able to function most effectively. When people are within this zone, they are typically able to readily receive, process, and integrate information and otherwise respond to the demands of everyday life without much difficulty.
Our Autonomous Nervous System (ANS), the part of the nervous system that regulates most of the body's internal functions, has two important components that together take care of homeostasis in the body : the sympathetic (S) and the parasympathetic system (PS).
PS manages ao. the rest and digest response. The S manages ao. the fight and flight response.
According to Reich the parasympathetic (mainly n.vagus) always functions where there is expansion, dilatation hyperemia, turgor, "Out of the self-toward the world", pleasure and joy.
Conversely the sympathetic nervous system functions whenever an organism contracts, shows pallor, feels anxiety and responses to pain, goes "Into the self", sadness and unpleasure. These days we know that this is only partly true, pleasure is of both S and PS, it lies in the balance and harmonious interaction of both systems.
WOT describes all the (animal) **defensive states**: the hyperarousal connected to sympathetic activation, the hypoarousal characteristic of parasympathetically mediated dorsal vagal responses, and the 'deer in the headlights' frozen flight response connected to high S and PS co-activation. Blocking pleasure and simultaneously seeking it compulsively may coexist.
Pushing on the gas (S) and the brakes (PS) at the same instant. "You can drive, but it is not cruising. It is a jerky ride, burns more gas and isn't great for your car" (Heartmath.com).



Through the eyes of **Steven Porges**:



The **life process** consists of a continuous alternation between expansion and contraction, and the fundamental biological functions of contraction and expansion are applicable to the psychic as well as to the somatic realm. We move in and out of these S and PS states countless times throughout our day, and we should work them “50-50” in a balanced way. The most visible action is breathing in = S (heartbeat fastens), breathing out = PS (heartbeat slows).
Between the extremes of sympathetic hyperarousal and parasympathetic hypoarousal is a ‘window’ or range of optimal arousal states in which emotions can be experienced as tolerable and experience can be integrated. This optimal window was first named such by Dr. **Dan Siegel**.

The WOT model of autonomic arousal explains the fluctuations in clinical features that can occur unpredictably and rapidly in the disorders that arise from the effects of severe trauma (Ogden). In addition, it prescribes a treatment approach: that of **regulating autonomic arousal within the WOT**, in which affect and cognition can be tolerated so that patients can both think and feel. When patients with trauma-related disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and borderline personality disorder, develop greater ability to self-regulate autonomic arousal, symptoms tend to diminish or ameliorate, and they are able to engage more effectively in well-established treatments for trauma.
Though much of the research is done in view of psychopathology, many conclusions are valid for “normal” clients with problems that are just typical to our human condition.

2.4. Anhedonia

The capacity for normal pleasure is viewed as essential to healthy psychological function or well-being. Conversely, affective disorders can induce either the pathological absence of pleasure reactions (as in clinical **anhedonia)** or the presence of excessive displeasure (**dysphoric** emotions such as pain, disgust, depression, anxiety, or fear).
The lack of pleasure is one of the most important symptoms of many mental illnesses, including depression.
Core “liking” for fundamental pleasures might persist intact in anhedonia, but go unacknow-ledged: fundamental pleasure may not be abolished in depression after all. Instead, what is called anhedonia might be due to **motivational deficits** and **cognitive misappraisals** of rewards, including retrospective or anticipatory savoring, or to an **overlay of negative affective states**. This may still disrupt life enjoyment, and perhaps render higher pleasures impossible. So rather than experiencing a lower-than-normal amount of pleasure when engaging in an activity, the anhedonic undervalues rewards (Berridge and Kringelbach). This contributes to lower motivation and a reduced drive to achieve pleasant outcomes.
People experiencing normal anticipation of pleasure tend to overestimate, which increases the likelihood that the individual will make extra effort to pursue pleasurable activities.
Forbes suggests the scheduling of pleasant events, as well as explicitly savoring positive hedonic experiences as psychosocial depression treatments worth pursuing. Similarly, Treadway and Zald proposed applying a treatment model incorporating techniques such as **“Behavioral Activation”** to circumvent the low motivation to seek out pleasurable experiences commonly found in depression.

Although highly speculative, the **default network** might deserve further consideration for a role in connecting eudaimonic and hedonic happiness. **Pathological self-representations** by the frontal default network can link hedonic distortions of happiness to eudaimonic dissatisfaction, such as in cognitive rumination of depression. Conversely, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for depression, which aims to disengage from dysphoria-activated depressogenic thinking, might conceivably recruit default network circuitry to help mediate improvement in happiness via a linkage to hedonic circuitry.

While it remains unclear how pleasure and happiness are exactly linked, it may be safe to say at

least that the pathological lack of pleasure, in anhedonia or dysphoria, amounts to a formidable obstacle to happiness. And for now we can summarize:

Pleasure = (physical) ***sensation*** *+ (cognitive)* ***appraisal*** *+ (affective)* ***behavior*** *+ (subjective)* ***feelings****.*

Basic pleasure stays, appraisal can change and cause behavior and feelings to change with it. (Attachment 1)

3. Philosophical and cultural literature

A rich source of ideas, empowering insights based on science, empirical observations, inspiration and creativity. People clearly didn't wait for full scientific evidence to engage in paths to solve to their difficulties and alleviate their dis-ease.

A broad perspective on pleasure comes from Brother Pierre-Yves **:**
Pleasure, happiness, joy. .."In part they are the same thing. They are perhaps **three degrees of increasing intensity**, and have different accents. Pleasure seems more connected to circumstances: we feel that it is partial, occasional, transitory. It is also very immediate, and belongs mainly to life on earth. Happiness seems less connected to particular circumstances or occasions: it is more lasting, more ample, deeper; we feel that it is an inner state, a harmony with oneself and with existence. We could say the same of joy, but with a sense that is more spiritual, inexpressible, and mysterious, since joy has to do with the fundamental mystery that we are in ourselves…
There is the pleasure of the body; but the body is not only physical; it is also a symbol of our inwardness, and we reach our inner being starting from the experience of the body….even the most bodily of pleasures affects the whole of our being."

Pleasure according to **religion** seems to be mostly about bodily sensation/gratification. It has an external input and it's causes are easily replaced. Worldly and frivolous, and often with a deprecating charge, suspect of being egocentric, addictive, self-defeating. The short-lived pleasure of indulgence. Luckily there is also joy, no external cause and a state ever present. This reminds me of hedonic gloss in science and of Core Essence.

Sharon Salzberg clearly explains the viewpoint of Buddhism: there is an anxiety in happiness that is solely based on the experience of pleasure (as nice as it is) because along with that dependence comes a need for the pleasure not to change…the weariness of going from object to object, from experience to experience, needing more and more intensity, not feeling we have enough stimulation right now to feel alive, and that we must find it…somewhere. This is the addictive spiral. What contemplative traditions describe as craving is a source of great suffering. Craving is distinguished from motivating force, intentionality, and determination; in craving there is an element of fixation on what we don't have, to the detriment of appreciating and being grateful for what we do have.

Alexander Lowen writes that pleasure is being fully alive in the here and now, in the body. And that the antagonist of pleasure is not pain but achievement. Also antithetical is the will, the forcing current. A preoccupation with goals and achievement characterizes people who are afraid of pleasure. Pleasure and achievement both have their monopolar aspects, and they are polarities that work antagonistically :

Pleasure ⟷ Achievement
(Essence) (Ego)

And life is sweet, when one is hovering somewhere in the middle.

In Core Energetics, the view of **Anna Timmermans** is : "Pleasure is the moving of energy, be it + or -. Insight is fine but the energy needs to get moved in the body."

The **Barbara Brennan School** holds the same view. Pleasure is a skill to "pass" for graduating in psycho-spiritual development in the 4th year of training. Students are observed for the quantity and quality of pleasure they can handle. And it does not need to be perfect. In their words, derived from the Pathwork: "Pleasure is a fundamental and potent human experience, at once a physiological, an energetic awakening, an opening of the heart to love, a surrender to effortless intention, and an expression of our core essence. To be alive is to have the capacity, the longing and intention to experience the sheer pleasure of manifesting in this world our unique spark of the divine. And without such pleasure we cannot heal".

Some further highlights in the **Pathwork:**
- The higher the overall development of an entity, the greater its bliss and pleasure, and the less its pain and suffering. A big obstacle to joy is **perfectionism**. Yet human beings are meant to experience maximum pleasure
- When the deepest layers of the psyche are reached, it becomes apparent that the raw, primitive instincts are concerned only with the experience of pleasure. Behind the superstructure of moral standards, laws and rules, lies the craving for pleasure supreme, regardless of the consequences. And it takes maturation to grow out of childish and self-concerned pleasure drives that are often destructive.
- An **infant** experiences physical pleasure more strongly than the average adult human being, as it is not burdened with guilt, shames and misconceptions. Later on, fear and shame of disapproved instinctual drives (sexual and erotic) cannot possibly mature them so they can integrate.
- **Society** harbors a sense of wrongness, with deeply ingrained prejudices and misconceptions around pleasure. Together with personal fears and negative experiences, this makes for crippled individual.
- The life force is a free flowing energy current. We are meant to experience the utter bliss of the life force and life on earth is a preparation for this supreme pleasure, so it is of the utmost importance to remove the trouble spots within the psyche. Trouble spots mean that the pleasure drive gets fixed in connection with negative, unpleasurable experience, by guilt and fear, by misconceptions and the faulty assimilation of experience. This negative fixation takes two extreme forms, with many degrees between them: anger and rebellion, or guilt and fear, both thwarting the healthy unfoldment of the pleasure principle.
- Life has 3 essential elements: movement, consciousness and **experience**. When the feeling body is numbed, our ability to experience suffers. And experience contains the pleasure principle.
- Our **erotic response** occurs only when there is at least a slight element of rejection, fearfulness, insecurity or pain. When these negative emotions are completely absent, the erotic response may also be absent.
- Overcoming our **resistance** to explore deeper is exhilarating and liberating.
- It is often proclaimed that pleasure for pleasure's sake is wrong. The truth is exactly opposite. In a mature individual the pleasure drive is not self-centered and excluding, it gives and receives. The legitimate need for pleasure is not in opposition to true spiritual self-realization, but is one of the necessary prerequisites.
- The simultaneous **longing for pleasure and the fear of it** constitute one of our most basic inner struggles. If we fear pleasure, we inadvertently but logically want the opposite, the unpleasure. This creates tension, separateness and contraction. Whoever blocks pleasure,

must, perforce, also block the deep connection with the spiritual self and the way to the cosmic state of bliss. Physical and spiritual pleasure are one, not opposites.
- On the psychological level, we look for our pseudo-satisfactions of our pretenses, our role-playing, our defenses. We can become capable of taking in genuine pleasure only to the degree we want to give up the false negative pleasures. To the degree that we assume **self-responsibility**, respect and love ourselves because we do not cheat even in the subtlest of ways, to that same degree we become more and more capable of experiencing pleasure. Pleasure lies in **harmony with the life pulse** (expansion, contraction and stasis).

Another view is the **Diamond Approach**, a path that offers an immense and precise body of knowledge about the nature of reality and the process of spiritual realization.
- All **essential aspects** (freedom, joy, intelligence, openness, fullness, openheartedness, clarity, love, self-respect, power, peace,…) are **seen and experienced as pleasure**, as all kinds of joys and delights. Yet one cannot seek happiness, for it is the result of realizing the **Truth**. The personality, which has security and pleasure as its aims, cannot be happy. Pursuing pleasure or safety will entail covering up any unpleasant or frightening truths. This automatically closes Joy. For Joy is the radiance of the heart when Truth is appreciated.
- Knowing Pleasure Distinct from the Drive for Pleasure: …Thus the drive for pleasure can become the energy that opens us up to a new arena in our development. ..To fully know ourselves as mature beings means that we become individuals who are able to fully be and express our true nature in a **pure and simple** way. We learned that the pleasure we seek comes from our nature and that we do not have to find it in the physical realm, although we can. We can know pleasure as distinct from the drive for pleasure or from the drive to procreate, and in this way feel the **pleasure of being**. We are a being of presence with the ability to know ourselves completely in the now, without being defined by our own or someone else's ideas of who we are. This is deeply blissful.
- When the body cannot accommodate the presence of essence, a person might attempt to get the pleasure and freedom he seeks through involvement in various physical activities. But whatever pleasure results involves either tension, friction, exertion, discharge, or physical contact. These are good on their own merit, but they fail to reach the richness of essence in its qualities of pleasure. They don't come close to the sweetness, refinement, exquisiteness, smoothness, and delicacy of essential experience. In a sense, **essence is pure pleasure**, a pleasure that exists in itself, and not a reaction, a response, or a result of anything. Our true nature, in one of its many facets, is pure unadulterated pleasure and delight.
- Life first begins to reveal its mystery in primitive, biological ways, then advances to the level of the emotions, and ultimately appears in **mystical union** itself, consciously. This unity is more than the joining of bodies; the physical unity of intercourse is merely an approximation of something far more intimate. That is why the unity we are talking about requires so much maturity. It requires much development, much refinement, for human beings to appreciate that the erotic encounter is not just for pleasure, not just to have orgasm, but to experience the exquisiteness of contact, of intimacy, to experience the bliss of coming to know the mystery together. By coming together, we are able to know the unity of reality.
- The soul is powerfully driven by the animal instincts, dominated by the need for gratification. Gratification is the pleasurable satisfaction of her desires, whether they are for safety and security, company and intimacy, sexual and physical pleasure, or for anything else she craves. Structured thus, the soul grows up adhering to two **deep delusions**: that the purpose of life is the gratification of her desires; and that the objects of gratification exist **outside her** in the physical world. She becomes enmeshed in a life of seeking instinctual gratification, ruled by the pleasure principle, which is seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. At some point, the soul sees that truth must come before pleasure, and that she must **look inward** for what she needs. Most human beings are not willing to make this shift, and are not even convinced of its truth or necessity.

The soul comes up against this deeply entrenched view of reality when she begins to learn to love truth for its own sake, especially when this truth turns out to be inside her, for it is the truth of her nature. And truth may be pleasurable or painful.
- Essence is not alive; it is aliveness. It is not aware; it is awareness. It does not have the quality of existence; it is existence. It is not loving; it is love. It is not joyful; it is joy. It is not true; it is truth. The quality of aliveness of essence is of a different order from that of the body. The body is alive, but essence is life itself. Because it is incapable of self-reflection it cannot be dual (Almaas).

4. Pleasure in CEP practice

Evidently, pleasure is a large field: from basic pleasures of the senses to the experience of utter bliss. That sounds so rich and wonderful. Yet somehow this is not how it shows up in our practice. Hedonic gloss has to do with awareness: “I have pleasure and I know it, allow it, savor it.” And it shows. I see that gloss often pictured in the media, but in real life it is more rare. People often look serious, at least in Belgium. And clients obviously don’t come from pleasure. What happened?
When a young person gets frustrated while in essence, he is bound to leave the flow and protest against the pain he experiences. He somehow finds a way to protect himself and he uses the defense his ego construed again and again. Because he is smart, he starts living more and more from ego-values. These are seen as second best. The longing for love is exchanged for approval, the pleasure for fun and/or achievement. At least he feels he can control these. Instinctively we all recoil from pain, and so it is not that he blocks his pleasure but that he defends against pain. As both pain and pleasure use the same pathways, his pleasure, high and low, gets blocked to the same extent. This process happens largely subconsciously.
We see people set goals and intentions, often working hard with little or no pleasure as a way of life. At first they are not aware they block pleasure, they just feel a lack. They compensate with all kinds of fake pleasures, looking outside for a refill quite literally. Some people revert to pain, to divert their attention from other uncomfortable feelings or to at least feel something. Some get addicted to the after rush of pain. They may keep wanting without even liking, as in addiction. Somewhere they know this. For the longing for essential qualities remains intact, whatever they may consciously think about the existence of essence and soul.
One may come to believe he is not worth “it”. This belief sits deep inside and he may feel shame around it which is denied or suppressed. There is a disconnection from soul/source, so he doesn’t take responsibility. He probably blames, his parents, fate, life, himself, and keeps roaming about on the bottom side of life, not seeing what else he could do. And if he undertakes action by himself, he finds it hard to sustain the effort. He de-presses further. Till he goes for help, or life brings him in crisis and hopefully he gets help.
Our life stories are unique, but the instinctive fear of pain we all share.

4.1. Notes on regular psychotherapy practice and other approaches

Seligman finds effective: (1) Interventions based on accomplishment and positive relationships (2) interventions based on pleasure, engagement, and meaning and (3) self-administered positive psychology interventions based on the **PERMA-model**, most effective for those people in the middle range of the well-being continuum. (PERMA: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment). He proposes the “three good things”-exercise, i.e. writing down three things that went well on that day for each topic and reflecting why these things happened.
Counting your blessings is a nice strategy. But what if the blessings are actually not many? Or

experienced as not enough?
Behavioral activation is a good option. Capacity for basic pleasure largely remains intact. So we can use that to guide the client towards attending to the basics in life, a safe clean place, good food, enough water intake, regular income.
But what if the client won't value the pleasure he gets? If he likes dancing, does he go and look for a dance? Or does he say "Bwah, just leave me in my low life, I give up". Left on his own, he probably doesn't go, or goes for appearance sake.
Through healings or energetic massages, the client may get a basic experience that life can be good, also for him. He can relax now, albeit for one hour, and take in.

4.2. Assessment of pleasure

First, let's see where the client is. There are a number of questionnaires used for the assessment of anhedonia, ao. the Snaith–Hamilton Pleasure Scale (SHAPS). We can use them for pointers when we go looking for pleasure in ourselves and in our clients (attachment 2).

When observing a client, we look for different levels of pleasure. The Core pyramid or Brennan Energy Field model are guiding maps for signs of inner and outer pleasure.

In the physical: is the body healthy? Does it show signs of dis-ease?
Level 1: how is client's experience of his body? His life? Is he in pain or comfortable?
Level 2: how client feels about himself? Hard or friendly? Soft round belly? Can client belly laugh?
Level 3 : does client think well about himself? About life? Judgements?
Level 4 : open hart, full chest, not retracted or fallen in, shoulders relaxed, free breathing. Relationships?
Level 5: a clear, calm to lively voice, medium pitched. Free expression? Does client hear me?
Level 6: clear, sparkling eyes, able to look into mine, playful attitude. Frowning, vertical lines ? Vision?
Level 7: sense of humor, freedom, wisdom
Strong intention (hara), or split intention?
Core: a graceful walk, fluid movements, light and supple, resilient. Facial expression alive, open face. If wrinkles, most from laughing. Beautiful complexion, radiant. Pleasant vibe.

What is clients' default mode? Does he wear a permanent smile, that makes him forget he actually has little or no pleasure?
Is the pleasure this client has pure pleasure, living from core, or does he show more pleasure for outside subjects , for ego-values, for his beliefs about the subject (food, sex,…)?
Does client have a big WOT or is he numb? What pleasures is client avoiding?
Where is his negative pleasure? Slips of tongue, gestures, blushing, silence,…can give clues.
People experiencing arousal show unrest, fidgeting, rapid eye movements, rapid breathing or maybe just nothing.
Through assessing the capacity and motivation for pleasure, we can work functionally to remove barriers against pleasure. And we can check progress. Without making pleasure a specific goal.

4.3. The role of shame

A good start for sessions may be to address the issues of unease and shame around being a client as such, and around the ability of client to feel himself and his pleasure. Shame cripples us. But it is rarely brought in therapy. Needing to go into therapy is in itself a shameful experience for many people. The context of psychotherapy is by its nature a shame inducing relationship aimed at exploring shameful issues (Brown, Tangney and Dearing).
Frontal asking after their pleasure tends to yield pensive faces in clients, sadness also because of their lack of pleasure. And most importantly, clients may go closing off and retreat into silence and quitting therapy because of the shame they feel about their block in our fun & frenzy

oriented society.
So observing the pleasure signs at first from the sideline seems important. You can also make a theme out of it for a session: ask if client feels comfortable, name the discomfort, look what the meaning is. And what to do with and about it. You can even give homework, to notice when client feels discomfort and what he does with it. People develop lots of skills to evade it. So in session, we can invite the client to look it in the eye (Konig).
Explore client's boundaries: make a face, use humor, explore client's response to touch. Play "Peep or hey, I see you…". Children love it, clients too, if at the right moment.
Get to know client's taboo zones so you can respect these (for now), and client can receive his pleasure at relative ease.
The titles of the books written by Brenée Brown speak clear language: "I thought it was just me", " Daring greatly", "Rising strong", "Braving the wilderness". (See the picture?)
What helps is a large dose of empathy and psychoeducational (group) work for building shame resilience (Brown). And for finding the courage to look underneath the mask.

4.4. The role of pleasure

To seek pleasure for pleasure's sake, as an end in itself, is to miss it. So, if we should not seek pleasure as such, we should also not work towards pleasure as such. At least not at first. We can do our normal Core Evolutionary Process. Freeing the core will be freeing the pleasure. Done ☺! Even so, some specifics.

Pleasure is **subjective** and **state-dependent**, so we dovetail our policies to client's needs.
We look for procedures that offer safety, newness and meaning to expand his personal window of tolerance, catering to the numb as well as to the oversensitive, hypervigilant client in specific ways.
Capacity for **basic pleasures** remains largely intact and we use that. Pleasures available by outside stimuli are ok to look for, to bestow them on yourself and allow yourself to enjoy them. It may free the way to further look for truth in your life, to find the courage to take some risk and free your essential joyful experience inside.
Pleasure is always lived in the **NOW**. Anticipation or memory of pleasure is in itself a pleasure, and the actual experience of that is also in the now. Take time to allow and help the client with his **grounding**. The present may contain lots of pain or sadness, many people feel not safe there and are seldom in the now. The rising flow of energy in grounding may be pleasurable or bring fear where it meets and tends to open the blocks. Mindfulness too may at first be counterproductive. Yet all processing needs to happen in the now.
Core practice teaches the ability to expand further without losing the grounding (and getting fearful), which is important to be able to work constructively with your feelings. After all, you can expand only so far as you are grounded.

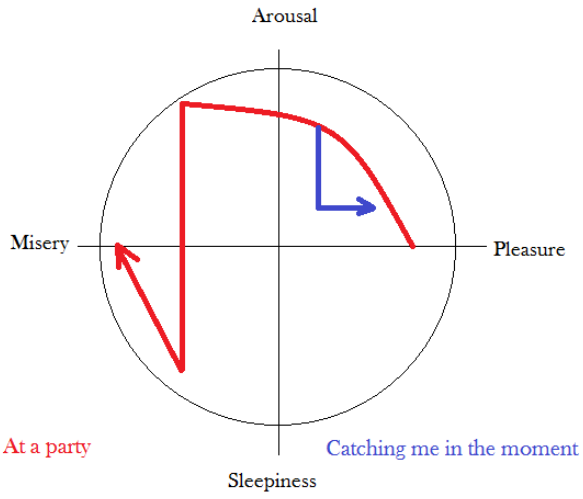
We offer a new experience, aiming at love, peace, clarity. To go for these essence qualities, we should not look for pleasure but for truth. And truth is at first (and last): pleasure is getting what I want, just the way I like it.
What does client want? Really want? Damned question, difficult to answer if one is out of contact with Self. Yet the client often knows, somewhere, at least partly. Together we identify his **longing and desires**; they will probably amount to some form of happiness.
Be it pleasure, happiness or joy, to get them they have to be **received** or welcomed. We do not somehow fabricate these by ourselves…Yet on the other hand, there is nothing passive about welcoming them…Receiving them means causing them to exist actively within us, choosing them again and again, cultivating them, tending them as one tends a fire (Brother Pierre-Yves).
The mother of all pleasure is to open your receptivity, your direct afferent sensitivity pathways. For if you don't, you are bound to take indirect pathways and look outside for a refill, looking for

achievement of pleasure or approval in the other(s). You look outward instead of inward, for ever vigilant, out of contact with Self. You become dependent on others and hate them for it, becoming prone to power games. Getting second hand pleasure only.
To **learn to look inward** again, into ourselves, and give ourselves the pleasure of this, we have several good options:
- first steps with Mindfulness and focusing
- touching and exploring an object with your hand (exercise on the website of Betty Martin)
- HRV (Heart Rate Variability) training with Em-wave (Heartmath).
- Wheel of Awareness from Prof. Dan Siegel is a full training to integration taking 20 minutes to as long as one likes. From sensory to higher pleasures via the 5 senses, the body scan, internal states of conscious awareness or interoception, self-observation and interconnection.
The exercises all slow one down and give something to notice, using a neutral (and repeating) event or object to focus the attention. They relax, still one is awake and fully present. A condition for pleasure.
These obliquely pleasure-seeking exercises point at “allowing, be willing to... “, the PS attitude, versus “wanting to…”, which is a S attitude that may contain a considerable forcing current. As in trying (too) hard.
Similarly in sexual intercourse or in self-cultivation it is important to release the goal of orgasm, relax, have patience and attention for the feeling Self and surrender to pleasure.

4.5. The role of arousal.

Children in arousal tend to yell and scream, which is a way to lower the tension. So what did your parents say? They probably stopped you and broke of your pleasure/arousal state? Mine did. They spoke in warning voice: “This will lead to crying!”. We found them annoying and oppressive, but yes, they were right of course (as Lowen explains: the convulsive discharge of crying is the primary mechanism for the release of tension in the human being). And pleasure got slightly distrusted. Children learn to restrain, to stay collected and controlled. It is possible therefore a client doesn’t consciously block the feeling of pleasure or pain, but rather blocks or limits the arousal, the flow, the energetic movement in his body, the takeover of his conscious behavior by spontaneous movements in and from the body and the mind. To avoid potential pain, he will limit his experience, keep small, do it his way and doesn’t take a risk. And/or as this does not totally protect him, he blocks his “afferent pathways” to block his sensations. That means blocking the front side of the body, the breath, the feeling side, mainly front chakra’s 2-3-4, and go live from the head or the will.

To allow the client to stay in his WOT, the therapist needs to create a **safe** environment, allowing the client time to look around and meet. Take it slowly. Where is a safe space in the office? How does it feel there?
If I use the circumplex model as a map for a journey, this may happen when a client comes: his arousal increases and he moves from relative contentment to distress, and gets stuck there. Then he rolls in for a while until arousal drops to safe levels. Feeling safe, he starts moving again but feels miserable. It is important clients learn about their WOT. It may offer consolation to realize that he is able to find pleasure in relative rest. It is in arousal that he loses himself and behaves adversely, not because of pleasure. Even if he blocks his pleasure somehow, he is not totally doomed for distress! (Either –or, the black and white thinking of the inner child tends to blind when feeling stressed).
So the client gets nuance now: it is not that he can’t



have pleasure, it is that he can't have so much arousal. He can have pleasure if he has less arousal. He can accept that for now and seek pleasure in quieter pastimes. And hey, pleasure may even be best at medium arousal!

Still, we don't like the loss of our arousal and pleasure. I think now that **sustained pleasure** is possible, while sustained arousal may be tiresome. Emotions are not of a voluntary nature and only partially under voluntary control. They emerge, wax, and wane according to rules in strictly determined fashion (Frijda). Arousal may at best behave like a classical emotional wave, taking seconds, a couple of minutes, maximum 20 minutes.
Anxiety, anger and distress however may seem to last a long time. But, that's only because we perpetuate it by trying to inhibit it. If we had left it unregulated, it would have likely followed its natural course of going up and down in a few seconds,(maybe a couple of minutes if we were truly terrified, sad or angry (Dr. Amelia Aldao)**.** The same may go for arousal when we try to control it, and this eventually sends us in stress.
Pleasure of the senses depends largely on movement and duality. It waxes and wanes, needs renewal or the awareness of its opposite. But pleasure as the experience of essence is a non-dual state. And as such is sustainable, a constant undertone, even if unnoticed for a while.

4.6. The role of the Autonomic Nerve System

Above exercises to go inward are safe, simple and very effective methods that activate the PS system. Most people can feel the PS literally kicking in, after a few minutes or after playing with them for a while. This skill is of major importance for one needs to come out of endless activity and contraction (S) and enter the kingdom of the parasympathetic (PS). Or at least come to balance in the autonomic nerve system (ANS), to coherence, to WOT to be able to learn. We balance our assertive and receptive pulsations, John Pierrakos called it.
In reality, clients are not balanced 50-50 but maybe 90 S-10 PS. We need to check for that. Where are they in their WOT? Not everybody tells you where their limits are, clients may not even have clue.
I often work with Transactional Analysis model of Parent, Adult and Child. I see clients engage in a conversation Parent-Child, which keeps them blamed and aroused. They get pushed by the Parent and their Child openly or covertly resists, shrinks, stresses. The Adult is on holiday for indefinite time, no break, no relaxed pleasure. And to be able to think clearly, to integrate new information and to relate, client must be in the optimal arousal zone. So the work is to bring the client there. In his Adult. We do this on 3 cushions. Usually very revealing.

To bring the client in his WOT, we can work with the main pathway of the PS, i.e. the Vagus nerve, the 10th cranial nerve, running from the brain to the face, the thorax, the abdomen and the skin. Responsible for numerous tasks with our internal organs, important for our skin innervation and our internal sense. The **rebooting knob** for our system (B. Martin). Interventions to increase the vagal nerve tone involves work along the arousal axis**:**

To bring yourself back in WOT (acute, overwhelm):
Find a safe place, ground down, bend your knees.
Take slow deep breaths, like in a 4-2-6-2 rhythm, in- pause-out-pause. Breath to open ribcage and tightness in the body-mind. Engage Ujjayi breath (Darth Vader breath) in slow tempo, sending your energy down, breath your overwhelm into the earth.
Come into your body, bring your attention to your physical sensations. Feel your feet.
Place your hands on your head & heart or heart & belly, make contact, feel safe there.
Open your eyes, look around, make eye contact.
Self-regulate emotions, divert your attention, use WAE (witness, ask, experience).
Do a reality check.

Tapping on the body, the meridians, your collar bone, your hand…
Lie on your right or left side, with singing bowl vibrations, soft music, light,…
Rhythmic throwing of a ball, squeezing a soft ball.
Arousal is affair of the limbic system (Dan Siegel). His Hand-brain model is practical to use, as is his adagio to engage the cortex : “Name it to tame it”.
Some clients repeatedly don’t respect their limits for reasons of their own. Limits are a variable thing anyway, not constantly the same. So we bring client in his WOT for now.

Train and enlarge your WOT (long term)
Yoga asana (cat cow breathing, downward dog, sun salutes,…).
Pranayama, breathing practice, meditation, visualization,…
Aim to become the objective, compassionate observer of your mind.
Practice grounding.
Receive healings & massages, practice conscious relaxation.
Chanting, other singing.
Look for pleasurable social interaction, hugging, cultivate relationships.
(Core EP) therapy, tension-charge-discharge-relax training, other bodywork.
Running or jogging strengthens your container.
Dancing, 5 rhythms, authentic movement, Biodanza, Continuum, Tai Chi, Qigong
Train the pleasure muscles: strengthen your pelvic floor. And other muscles too.
Acupuncture, acupressure, deep tissue massage.
Take a risk, start small. Allow it takes time.

Heartbeat and blood pressure go down, creativity and sexuality increase.
Heartmath specifically mentions: **Coherence Is Not Relaxation.** The state of coherence is both psychologically and physiologically distinct from the state achieved through most techniques for relaxation. At the physiological level, relaxation is characterized by an overall reduction in autonomic outflow (resulting in lower HRV) and a shift in ANS balance towards increased PS activity. Coherence is also associated with a relative increase in PS activity, thus encompassing a key element of the relaxation response, but is physiologically distinct from relaxation in that the system oscillates at its natural resonant frequency and there is increased harmony and synchronization in nervous system and heart–brain dynamics. And more pleasure.
Similarly, vigorous sun salutations, fire breathing and breath retentions actually activate the S. Active practices followed by relaxing ones lead to deeper relaxation than relaxing practices alone. It becomes easier to meditate.

4.7. Beliefs and images

I did a check for beliefs and images in my practice (and in me). Pleasure we want and are able to have, that is innate, but the cons may be larger than the pros. Emotional regulation happens when several appraisals co-occur. When the same event touches on several concerns, whichever concern is stronger or more salient is likely to win. In a complex situation, impulsive action follows one emotional concern, disregarding the others, and thus limits the choice of action (Frijda). What are our concerns?

On the one hand, **I want pleasure because:**
- I need it (to want to live, feel alive, to heal,…)
- it connects me to my aliveness, my life force, gets me out of my functioning mode
- it feels good (pleasure for pleasure’s sake) otherwise I get bored, I detach and leave
- it may break isolation and diminish loneliness, it diminishes my perception of pain
- it gets everyone on the same line, it speaks a common and universal language
- I want to escape my problems (may not be the best idea)

Indeed: pleasure supreme or bliss is a necessity, for bliss is expansion. You cannot expand and use your inherent potential unless you are in a state of joyousness. Expansion and bliss belong together, as do stagnation and frustration (PW 170).
These last two also appear as a result of the next statements:

I deny myself pleasure because (of "the others")
- pleasure is not safe, is dangerous (survival), touches on taboo's
- pleasure can be too much for my environment, even the gods may become jealous
- what if the other has no boundaries? (And what if I'd like that?)
- they'll show indecent behavior, they'll be bad, repulsive or revolting, and steal it from me
- they'll mock me or reject me, I'll get indignation and judgement,
- their pleasure gets attached to cruelty

.

I deny myself pleasure because (of "me")
- because I don't deserve it, (who do you think you are? Unworthy, not perfect, not ok)
- I don't know what will happen. To surrender to it is new, unknown, risky
- I fear for loss of (ego) control. Too strong, visceral feelings in the pleasure experience
- pleasure can be too much for me, I'll lose myself
- it makes me too vulnerable (fear of emotional exposure)
- I can't trust it, what if I have no boundaries? (And what if I'd like that?)
- I have no healthy model of touch by men or women, tickling and frolicking don't feel safe
- I don't understand, vague fear, ambivalence, old unspoken admonishments
- I'll show indecent behavior, I'll be bad, repulsive or revolting, and get rejected
- when I have pleasure, something bad will happen (I am a Calamity Jane)
- I may get obsessed with it when I allow it
- it can be stopped, I can lose it, it is impermanent, I fear it's finity and decrease = painful
- I despise pleasure, I resent people having pleasure
- pleasure is of the Child, and my Child is forever creating problems for me
- I'm not in a habit of having pleasure, it is a waste of time
- I then might make mistakes and loose …(not performing, achieving)
- I did well, but we are not there yet, no time to savor pleasure
- pleasure is imperative. You have to have fun and enjoy, or else…!
- I feel not refined, gross, indecent and immodest. (And what if I like that? Fun? Exciting?)
- my pleasure may get attached to cruelty
- this way I punish life, parents, I link pleasure to punishment, humiliation
- I'm better with problem's than with pleasure.
- I can't have more than my siblings
- I may fart, they may fart (and our worst fears always come true some sunny day).
- keeping still, small and modest is safe, performing and achieving set me safe
- I fear the power I have when in pleasure
- I have mostly guilty pleasures
- Sophie says: I need my pleasure! I used to say: I can do very well without it.

So the list of cons is way larger, especially the list pointing to self. Full of (immature) images and beliefs. The client says: "It is ridiculous, but…", and for sure, he does make sense somehow, for he is full of fears and lives up to them.
Fear of pleasure is fear of the pain that inevitably develops when an outward- flowing, expansive impulse meets a contracted and rigid or bound area of the body. Psychologically, the fear of the pain of loss, frustration and humiliation. (Lowen).
And fear belongs to the mask. It is not who we really are.

4.8. Core Evolutionary Process

After we brought the client in WOT, the second part of the work starts.
All bodyworkers ground, breath, move and interact with the client. Specific for Core is :
- we involve client's Core that is shining through from the start and work to free the enormous amount of energy bound in the defenses
- we don't stay neutral but bring ourselves actively, respond, co-work
- after dissolving the dysfunctions, we work towards self-fulfillment of client (J.Pierrakos).

4.8.1. Phase 1: Piercing the mask

To free clients energy we need to pierce the mask that may say: I am ok really… (sweet and serene) and after all, "the cold never bothered me anyway" as in Frozen (power).
Check for denying, defensive attitudes:
... I don't care for pleasure with vigilant eyes (schizoid).
…oh I do have pleasure…sweet smile? What would give you pleasure? Oh, so much! (oral)
…great fun yet poor me (masochist)
…negative pleasure, lots (psychopath)
…o yeah, pleasure, thin lips, a bit grumpy (rigid)
And I can't stand it, won't stand it, I'll make drama, endless stories.

Tell client your observations. Get a peek under the mask, with these questions:
How did your family regard the pursuit of pleasure? Was there value placed on what you enjoyed? Was joy or pleasure-seeking encouraged or discouraged? Did your family often laugh together? What events or experiences were celebrated with joy? Did your parents or caregivers enjoy their lives? What was the emotional atmosphere in your home? Was your home an open system, where friends were welcome? Was your home a closed system, only for immediate family? (after Terri Cole).

4.8.2. Phase 2: Facing the Lower Self (Pride, self-will and fear)

Some cons to pleasure come from fearing others, but most come from self-will, pride and fear in ourselves. Good news, for then it is well within our own hands.
Insight is corrective, but can in itself not redirect the distorted consciousness and heal at the roots. The power we need to (keep) open our window of tolerance, to learn, transform and heal is at first bound in our defenses and gets some release and relief through expressing the **negativity** and feel the negative pleasure in it: better to slam a door (oh, that does it for me!) than to de-press. "I'm no good?? You're no good**!!**." Juicy! Hidden maybe, but still juice.
To be sure, in this work I am looking for divine pleasure, but playing around with negative pleasure may free the way. I notice in my practice that is important to me, "yeah baby, now we're talking". I find it exciting when client moves out of the mask, through the Lower Self, often finding himself suddenly back on higher grounds. Higher grounds that were at first so hard to get to. Expressing honestly some negativity or naughtiness is very empowering. Hitting the cube and expressing irritation and hate can bring one suddenly to overwhelming sweet love. Pushing each other around and away with the cube or a sitting ball tends to lighten up the most depressive client. Have tools to box and kick on, matrasses, cushions to throw, magazines to tear up. A big towel to wring. A noodle is perfect for digging in nails.

Client doesn't look for our pity but for a way to safely express and unload his negativity. He longs, consciously or not, to be able to finally leave the restraining decency and bring the raw. Just being himself. Together we explore his denial and his fears. We look for meaning, cause, intention.
Until the client sees that the cause and substance of negative experiences is not the outer world

but his own intention toward the stream of energy (J.Pierrakos). …As long as we hold onto the little ego and to destructive attitudes, we impair our integrity and create agitation in the body-mind. In this state we cannot create the condition of relaxed inner receptivity, necessary for the experience of pleasure supreme (Thesenga). We take the client to the level of intention: his willingness to ground and stay here while he is finding out his (negative) intention towards pleasure. Client looks for: "Where am I not fulfilled?" And he tries to answer in truth, encouraged by his therapist to take responsibility for whatever comes. The inner intention may be quite different from the outer. Connecting with intention is a game changer, as **negative intent maintains the negativity**. And **negative intent is itself maintained by negative pleasure**.

We fear admitting our negative pleasure for fear of judgement. As Core therapist, our task is to meet and accept, reach out and receive, be it + or -. To train and get supervision to welcome it all with equanimity. No punishment, no judgement. We assist in the freeing of blocks and the muscular tensions, we have positive attention for the courage, the pleasurable, the warmth, the flow. And we move move move, slowly and softly to lively and grueling. We help the client take responsibility, albeit with small steps. Help him to make friends with his inner bitch, witch, troll, his glorious bastard…lots of pleasure is bound there, behind his character defenses.

…I leave my experience, split, and project strong hostility on you. I'll make my own pleasures (schizoid)
…You have to give it to me. But when it comes, there won't be enough and I won't take it in (oral)
…I focus on negativity, this won't work, and I'll show you. I'll blow up, no time for pleasure (masochist)
…I don't trust it. My way, or else. And you'll betray me while I have pleasure (psychopathic)
…I don't and won't feel it. I hate you, I will never open my heart to you (rigid)

I have a list of sentences we can use to help express negative intent, taken from the list of cons to pleasure. The crux is in expressing " I can't …"= "I won't…" and experiencing that:

I won't come here and now, I won't show me, I won't feel, I won't see myself as deserving, I won't let go (of control), I won't expand, I won't betray the memory of…I won't engage in futility, I won't allow…

Look for pride in cynicism, maintaining that people are only motivated by self-interest, or in sarcasm, with witty, sharp, bitter, caustic or ironic utterances designed to cut or give pain. Explore the (un)willingness to be vulnerable, the refusal to surrender to love.
All forms of negative pleasure cater to our inner destructive willful Child that wants constant attention, instant gratification and power over others. Fear of pleasure must be made conscious in order to battle it. "I'll doubt, brood, remain undecided, procrastinate, even in the most subtle ways, to open up, allow pleasure and live from my Core". It all needs to be admitted to and transformed. Once you can say in full consciousness "I am afraid of pleasure", the hopelessness will disappear (Thesenga).
One becomes willing to admit how his pleasure is scary, damaging to self or others and is willing to change that.
All gained energy tends to return to further rage and rant and for a while strengthen the block. The blaming is set loose, all things unforgiven surface. From a shallow "huhu, pleasure" to "I'll never ever…". Resentment and ill-will need to be expressed numerous times.
Some people don't believe in **catharsis**, saying one forms bad habits giving in to rage. I don't agree. If we express in safe circumstances where we can consciously explore, and then just once in a while hop through the limits of the WOT for a split second, feeling and expressing the ill-will fully, not colliding with it, the hate will transform, negative feelings dissolve. Client then faces the questions: Can I let go? Can I forgive?
The ability to handle pleasure is built step by step. For a client, it is not his fault that pleasure is blocked, but it is his responsibility. So we help him consider: How do I create this? Why do I choose fear as reaction to my reality? Am I willing to trust? Do I have a choice? If I block my

pleasure, I block my pain too, I get less sensitive, or numb. And if I free my pleasure, I feel more sensitive, I feel more pain but also more empathy, I become vulnerable and touchable. There'll be more tears, but that need not feel bad, it is rather warm and nice, unfrozen.
Client may fear that if he surrenders his negativity, he will lose his power, the excitement, the eros and the pleasure it temporarily affords him. The opposite is true. But he needs to take a risk and find out. (Most of us don't get this far that eros completely disappears. And once there, it would probably not bother us anyway).
To have the best chance for pleasure, turn away from total safety and achievement, take a risk and jump, showing yourself as you are. And then, one day, you'll just drop the negativity, like a hot coal (Eckhart Tolle).

4.8.3. Phase 3: Centering in the higher Self

Pleasure is made possible when the state of mind and emotions is quietly confident, calmly expectant and receptive, patient and unanxious, unhurried and unworried.(PW L 177)
If higher and lower pleasures (HP & LP) use the same pathways, we can use LP to access our HP. And vice versa. HP = Higher Self, which we need to be willing to access our lower self. Training our psychic muscles.
Seeking truth leads to pleasure**,** the simple pleasure of saying true things. "Pleasure does not have to be fun, it can also be about anger or sadness that I can feel and express, just speaking my truth, being me" (Sophie de Lacaze). Facing our problems and dealing with them brings satisfaction: being willing to observe, understand and express our feelings, surrendering to the body, allowing closeness and contact, keeping our negative impulses in check by choice and free will. This goes for all of us as we work painstaikingly through our fears, images and beliefs. It is not enough to see it, understand it, it has to be felt in the body how we deny ourselves pleasure. And how we again allow it.

Some examples in practice:
- Because I don't deserve it. Can I absolutely know that is true? (Byron Katie) I don't. Did I not do my very best? Am I not a divine creature? What is the use of me denying me pleasure? Does it serve anyone? Can I not serve infinitely better while having pleasure?
- Loss of control. Yes, but control is an illusion anyway. This control serves my fears and keeps me small. Can I not serve better when I allow myself expansion?
- Pleasure can be too much (looking in the eyes…), I loose myself. But I can practice.
- Pleasure is of the child, and my child creates forever problems for me Yes, but now I am an adult. I can set my intention to build and use my positive adult ego, to devote time to my daily review. I can listen to my Child as a source of creativity and spontaneity while my Adult holds the steering wheel.
- "Lord I am not worthy…", how many times did we say that as catholics? The original sin, my sins and imperfections…Jezus loves the sinners for they live closer to their truth, they are real. And as such closer to their salvation. Ha!
- The shocking and painful interruption of the flow. Of course pleasure makes me vulnerable. But I am vulnerable always, invulnerable is an illusion. I can take a risk, ask for support. I am not helpless. It won't destroy me, though my ego may get a bruise.
- Explore my taboos. With a trusted partner, I can explore tickling and playing around. Play with my discomfort and with loosing control. With strong feelings in the movement towards pleasure. Tolerate the anxiety. Repeat and add more time, till I feel satisfied.

Substitute the negative concepts and intentions by **positive gems of wisdom:**
My Core can't be hurt. I leave it with them, don't take it personally.
The stronger I am vested in my Essence and radiate, the less I am sensitive to rejection. They are free to like me or not.
Cultivate equanimity: "Is that so?" Disidentification leads to freedom from ego domination.

Accept contraction as part of the life pulse. Pleasure is in expansion, but also possible in contraction and stasis (in rest, introspection, reflection,…). That "wasted time" is when we integrate important information or come up with creative ideas. Those who protect their joys tend to be more productive.
Drop expectations whenever possible, “no expectations” keeps the field open, and often things turn out rather nice.
Have different pleasures, one pleasure only is a dangerous situation, have a back up. Several.
Accept that play (spontaneous experience) is good for health. Science says so!

4.8.4. Phase 4 : Sweet expansion, a life task

Pleasure is not just an icing on the cake, it is a deep drive, doing what you love, working towards life task and Core Qualities. What if you allowed pleasure? What if you owned your qualities, your beauty, intelligence, allowed your sensual pleasure?

For the rigid defense: geef jezelf zonder terughoudendheid
For the psychopathic defense: let your energy stream down and let go of the push
For the masochist defense: let your energy free
For the oral defense: allow yourself to take in, nourished by yourself
For the schizoid defense: allow it to move in your body, stay with it and savor it, let it make you whole.

You find joy in small things, allow the simple pleasures of life. You can invite abundance.
From the definition of pleasure, we work "to please, give pleasure, be approved" to or by ourselves, so our sense of worthiness does get confirmed. We know we are good enough.
We can be ourselves. And who knows, somewhere along the way, you actually do get the attention you like, gratification and empowerment.

Make a comprehensive **list** of things that brings you joy. Now is the time!
Pleasures you know and pleasures you dream of. Put the list where you can see it daily as a reminder to prioritize your pleasure. Give yourself a **daily time-out** to intentionally cultivate more pleasure in your life. Take an extra 10 minutes in the morning to calibrate your day, creating expansion and space. It can be sitting in silence with a cup of tea, or a full-out meditation to set your intention for the day. Visualize everything falling into place with ease and grace... with a smile on your face.
As part of your morning ritual, list a few things you are grateful for in the present moment. Think of the people who love you or how well you slept and feel **gratitude** for all of your blessings. Consciously being grateful for what brings you joy will energetically bring you more situations and relationships to elevate your joy quotient. Get moving, dancing. Start saying “yes” to the joy-filled life you seek and start saying “no” to the people and situations that deplete you of joy (inspired by Terri Cole).

4.8. The energy centers

If one has a longing to practice healing, it is particularly important one’s energy centers are open. In fear these centers are cramped and closed, and the life force cannot penetrate them. When however you inwardly open up for pleasure, joy, happiness on all levels of your being, the open relaxed attitude of “letting be” eventually opens the centers. This is a distinct experience in the body. The physical work with the blocks in the body is important here, as is the work with the feelings and thoughts, the emotional and mental attitudes of all chakra’s (PWL 170). Core helps us deal with these. Once the personality is firmly grounded in reality, in love, in a state of fearlessness and undefendedness, one can work with the energy centers directly, allowing the centers to open through conscious relaxation. It is safe to do additional breath work and

meditation to further open the chakra's and be able to use all the available spiritual energy.

The centers or chakra's are connected through 3 energetic channels that start from the base of the spine up to the head. The chakra's correspond with different nerve plexuses in the physical body. The three channels correspond to the autonomic nervous system. This is the way through which we can feel our Kundalini, and vice versa is the way through which the Kundalini can operate on us at physical level. In particular, the sympathetic is divided in right and left sympathetic, just like left channel (*Ida Nadi or Yin*) and right channel (*Pingala Nadi or Yang*); while the parasympathetic is the central channel (*Sushumna Nadi or Shen*). An important thing to notice is that parasympathetic system presents a discontinuity at abdominal level. Yoga teaches us that in the abdomen there is an area called Void or in Sanskrit, *Bhavasagara* (Ocean of Samsara or Illusions, earthly existence) that correspond to a discontinuity in the central channel before Kundalini awakening; it is this Void that prevents Kundalini from rising by herself: we need to overcome the delusion of matter to access a higher level.
So our autonomic nervous system is the key for an ancient knowledge of which we are ourselves the custodians Spiritual experience is no more a transcendental thing you need to believe without any evidence, just for faith, but it is an actualization of our being. Our Spiritual Being does not belong to an unknown dimension, but it is absolutely an integral part of our life. We can ignore it, but it is always there, waiting for our awakening (Sahaja Yoga, Silvana). To bliss.

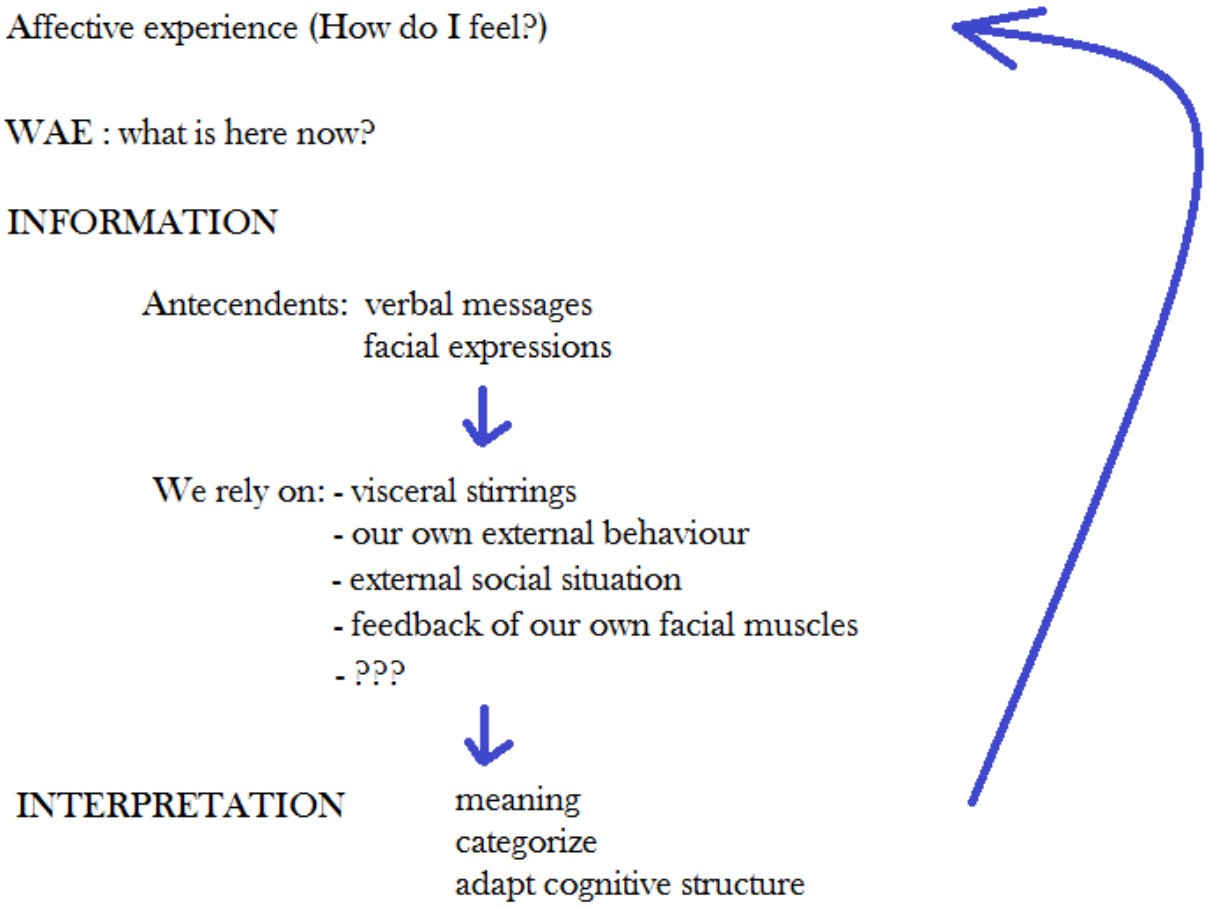
Conclusion

We human beings are endowed with this wonderful potential for pleasure. For infants, essence is a direct and total experience, with laughter and tears. But parents have no clear concept of core essence and are mostly identified with their ego, so they don't tend wisely to this gift. They mistake essence and expansion for pride and try to abase the child into submission, for his own good and their own convenience. The child from his side decides to leave the wild territory, feeling helpless and hostile before the giants who seem to have the power to dislodge him from paradise. He too identifies more and more with his own ego-constructs and carries on the split.
I knew this already but especially now, I feel the tragedy in my bones.
Fortunately, essence territory goes on existing even when not noticed or inhabited, and Core Evolutionary Process (energizing, exploring, expressing, flowing, surrendering to our impulses, in conscious awareness) is immensely helpful to find our way back home.
Directly striving for pleasure makes at first little sense, exploring and freeing ourselves from our blocks is of major importance then. After that, and even meanwhile, getting familiar with what gives us pleasure helps us to allow and to fully savor pleasure when it comes our way. To surrender to it, to let it have its way with us. Because no healing without pleasure, and pleasure heals.
For a long time my attitude towards pleasure was split. In the last 15 years, in the last 15 minutes, things changed. I still encounter boundaries to my capacity and intention for pleasure, but I rarely feel ashamed now, rather I am curious and go exploring. My growth process brought me to a higher level of happiness, more hedonia and more eudaimonia. I feel I am more of a pleasure for my environment too, most of the time.

This exploration specifically did bring a further reconciliation between me and my pleasure.
I learned Essence is not limited, so neither is Pleasure.
And that is what I'd love my clients to experience too.

Attachments

Attachment 1



Attachment 2

The content of the SHAPS-items (Snaith et al., 1995) may give some pointers for conversation:
1. I would enjoy my favorite television or radio program
2. I would enjoy being with family or close friends
3. I would find pleasure in my hobbies and pastimes
4. I would be able to enjoy my favorite meal
5. I would enjoy a warm bath or refreshing shower
6. I would enjoy the scent of flowers or the smell of a sea breeze or freshly baked bread
7. I would enjoy seeing other people's smiling faces
8. I would enjoy looking smart when I have made an effort with my appearance
9. I would enjoy reading a book, magazine or newspaper
10. I would enjoy a cup of tea or coffee or my favorite drink
11. I would find pleasure in small things, e.g. bright sunny day, a telephone call from a friend
12. I would be able to enjoy a beautiful landscape or view
13. I would get pleasure from helping others
14. I would feel pleasure when I receive praise from other people

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Pat Ogden, Janina Fisher: The Body as Resource: A Therapist's Manual for Sensorimotor Psychotherapy

Pat Ogden, Janina Fisher: Sensorimotor psychotherapy: Interventions for trauma and attachment

And for your pleasure : Mary Poppins, the movie